



When You Need to Come Back to Yourself

These are short exercises in nervous system regulation, to interrupt your survival response.

START HERE 2 MINUTES

The Physiological Sigh

Used by neuroscientists at Stanford University to rapidly reduce physiological arousal. It works within seconds.

1. Breathe in through your nose, a long, slow inhale to fill your lungs.
2. At the top, take a short second sniff in through your nose. This inflates the small air sacs that collapse under stress.
3. Now exhale slowly and completely through your mouth. Make it long, longer than the inhale.
4. Repeat 2 to 3 times. You don't need more than that.

***Why it works:** The extended exhale activates your parasympathetic nervous system, the physiological brake on your stress response.*

OTHER THINGS TO TRY

Exercises to Regulate Your Nervous System

Each of these has a neurological basis. None of them require much time. Do what you know your body can cope with.

Cold Water on Your Face or Wrists

Triggers the diving reflex, which slows your heart rate almost immediately. A cold shower or cold-water swim will trigger your body's energy recovery.

Slow Movement or A Short Walk

Bilateral movement (left, right, left, right) calms the amygdala, the brain's threat detector. Walking, swimming or gardening all naturally do this.

Humming, Singing or Sighing

Using your voice out loud vibrates the vagus nerve, which runs the length of your body and regulates your stress response. Talking is better than silence.

A Warm Drink, Held in Both Hands

Physical warmth signals safety to the nervous system. The ritual of making it happen matters too. A cosy blanket or warm jumper can all help.

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

Name 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, 1 you can taste. Doing this pulls your brain into the present moment.

Write One True Sentence

What's true for me now? Answer the question starting with "I am". Externalising your thoughts onto paper reduces the cognitive load for your brain.

MAKE IT A HABIT

Habit Stacking Helps to Increase Your Resilience

Your nervous system gets better at recovering the more you practise because you can train a physical response, in the same way you'd train a muscle. The easiest way to do this is to attach one technique to something you already do every day. You don't need to make time for it, just borrow a moment which already exists.

For instance, you could try the physiological sigh once a day at the traffic lights. Or do a 5-4-3-2-1 while you're sat in the doctor's waiting room. Hum while you unload the dishwasher. Hold your morning coffee with both hands, breathe it in and really feel the warmth before you put it down.

None of these take long. Repeated regularly they will improve your self-regulation and increase your resilience.