



GET YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM BACK IN BALANCE

BY KAITLYN VITTOZZI

Before you keep turning the page, thinking nervous system sounds like scientific mumbo jumbo that does not apply to you. . . . Have you experienced stress? How about exhaustion? Constipation? Totally withdrawn? Unmotivated? An argument from last month that you keep replaying in your head repeatedly. That is all tied to your nervous system.

The symptoms mentioned above may be a result of a dysregulated nervous system. While our pace of life is quick, it does not mean you have to live like that for forever.

The autonomic nervous system has two divisions – the sympathetic nervous system, and parasympathetic nervous system. Think sympathetic like a friend who is always sympathizing with everything and everyone, always, it is exhausting. Sympathetic is the part of your nervous system that has to DO something. The parasympathetic is responsible for your “rest and digest” functions that happen more easefully, steady – sitting on a balcony in the summertime watching the world go by without being triggered.

Now, it is not to say that a healthy regulated nervous system never experiences stress. Perfectionism can easily mess with your nervous system, so I would never encourage myself or any clients to strive for that. A balanced, regulated nervous system allows you to navigate life’s stressors without crumbling or lashing out at an innocent bystander – and instead making a healthy choice for you, grounded in the present moment.

Have you ever noticed a person in your life, or even when a pet walks into the room, who immediately makes you feel calm? That’s co-regulation – when someone else’s nervous system rubs off on yours.



Or maybe you can relate to my very opposite experience: I’ll be sitting at my laptop trying to work when someone comes in and starts talking to me – or rather at me about how awful their day is. As a yoga therapist and generally nice

person, I want to listen and hear them, but the flood of information and my poor brain and body trying to multi-task, result in a dysregulated nervous system. A healthy nervous system means your body can discern a stressful situation from an unnecessary worry. When something scary happens, and it’s resolved, your body can come back to a relaxed state.

We are also at a unique point in history. Many of us are starting to return to “normalcy” after a pandemic. If it’s been in a social setting with lots of people at one time – what impact do you think that will have on your energy levels? Even an extrovert might overdo it and found themselves depleted.

Scheduling self-care takes times – and odds are, you probably don’t have a lot of it right now. Here is a restful sequence to help you bring your nervous system back in balance. In general restorative yoga can be a helpful reset to your nervous system – check out Heidi at the Balance Living Center in Webster if you are looking for a class locally. You can also pair this sequence after more vigorous exercise – a healthy nervous system can seamlessly switch from one to the other. Effort and ease. All you need to start with is a blanket or beach towel.

- **Sandbag/Blanket Breathing:** Start with a blanket or pillow. Lie flat on your back. If that bothers your back, bend your knees, and bring your feet flat to the floor. Place the prop (blanket

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or pillow) over your abdomen. Breathe in and out gently through your nose, and into your belly. On your inhale you gently feel the prop rise, and on the exhale, you feel it lower. No need to force your breath, simply try to move it. Like any exercise, the first time might be difficult. If you feel proficient, you can use a little bit more weight like a yoga sandbag or buckwheat pillow and try to move from inhale to exhale without thinking too much. Try starting with two minutes and then work your way up into a longer practice. Eventually, your body will know if wants to stay or not. The prop is a useful way to practice present moment body awareness.

• **Tabletop wiggles:** Come to hands and knees, pad your knees

with a blanket or towel if they are uncomfortable on the floor or yoga mat. Get as neutral in your spine as possible, so left and right side of the body are about even, and you are not arching or rounding your back too much. Maintain the tabletop position and then start to move cross laterally – it’s a bit like pretending your spine is taffy. Without moving your hands, pull your right shoulder forward and your left hip back. Then draw your left shoulder forward and your right hip back. You can move a few times like this for about two minutes. It won’t look like a lot from the outside but can produce some big results on the inside.

• **Child’s Pose Variation:** Bring your big toes together, knees wide to the sides and sit your hips back on your

heels. Not possible? Slide some pillows or a big roll of blankets between your heels and your butt. Roll up a beach towel or blanket and rest your wrists on it – I like palms up, but if that bothers your shoulders, totally change the arm position to make it work for you. Or do like I did here – one of each. Stay as long as you like!

Any other mindbody resets you love? Let me know at Kaitlyn@TozziYoga.com. If you feel like stress is taking over your life, reach out for a no risk phone consultation to see how yoga therapy can transform your relationship with stress.