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Nine quick ways to calm your Nervous System

These are very simple techniques to calm your nervous system.

It can be useful, if possible, for people to experiment by trying out most (ideally all) of these strategies over a few days, and then choose 2-3 that are the most helpful. Then practice your favourites, so that you have 2-3 of these techniques reliably available when needed. Remember – You get good at what you practice!

1. **Letting go breaths** – This is a very simple and undemanding breath exercise: Let yourself breathe without any effort or need to change your breathing. Just accept it as it is – try not to judge yourself. Let the in breath happen by itself with no effort. When you breathe out practice letting go of any tension, and feeling the weight of your body on the chair/bed. Like a big sigh. Lying down will make this easier. Some people find it helpful to use counting – either the number of breaths (up to 10, and then begin again) or count to 4 with the inbreath and then again count to 4 with the outbreath. Experiment.
2. **SEND Breathing** - Use the mnemonic “SEND” to send your nervous system a calming message by counting some slow breathes like this (again, easiest to do lying down):
 - S** Breathe a bit more *slowly* than normal.
 - E** Breathe a bit more *easily and lightly* than normal
 - N** Breathe through your *nose*
 - D** Breathe with your *diaphragm* (belly expands with the inbreath and relaxes with the outbreath)
3. **“Feel my feet”** - Close or partly close your eyes (a soft gaze to the floor is fine), and see if you can feel where your feet are touching the floor. Feel just the ‘bare sensation’ of your toes one by one. That means just feeling a sensation as a sensory experience eg prickling, pressure, heat, etc. Try not to think about the feeling – just feel it. Then move on to your heel, sides of your feet etc. You can do this in as much detail as you like depending on the time you have.
4. **“Feel my hands”** - Close or partly close your eyes (a soft gaze to the floor is fine), clasp your hands loosely together and see if you can feel where your hands are touching each other. Take your time and systematically move from one part of your hands/fingers etc to the next. No rush. Again, Try not to **think** about the feeling – just **feel** it. People often find the hands easier to focus on than the feet. Use a relaxed effort – eg see if you can ‘allow’ the sensations rather than straining to find them.
5. **“Noting”** - Anytime you are feeling stressed, take a moment to look around and name 5 things you can see and 4 things you can hear, and three things you can feel. This brings you into the present moment and can be especially useful if you have unpleasant feelings overwhelming you.
6. **Mindful activity** – choose an activity that you do regularly – it could be washing your hands/dishes, brushing your teeth, having a shower, setting up your computer at the beginning of a study session. Slow down during the activity – notice the sensations you are feeling, use a relaxed curiosity – don’t strain or try too hard, just feel the sensations and try to enjoy them.
7. **Clench and relax** - Clench your fists tightly as you breathe in, and then slowly relax them as you breathe out. Repeat a few times till you feel calmer. Again, focus on the sensations in detail.



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8. **Five finger breathing** (Good for teaching kids to relax, with a handy side effect of relaxing you too!): Hold up one hand with your fingers spread out. With the index finger of your other hand slowly trace along the sides of each finger and thumb. Concentrate of the sensations you feel and breathe in each time you go up and out as you go down.
9. **Drinking water mindfully** and kindly – This is good when you need to steady yourself, and can also be useful when you are struggling with resisting temptation (eg overindulging on cheese and crackers/wine when I get home!). Drink half a glass of water slowly, ideally with your eyes closed (if appropriate), and notice the sensations of the water as it goes down. Add some kind encouraging phrases and use a gentle caring tone in your mind eg “Its OK you’re doing great, I know this is a difficult moment, just do your best, you’ll get there” etc. Compassion is a very powerful tool to calm an upset – think of comforting a friend or child.

A note about distracting thoughts:

Distracting thoughts are NORMAL! When they come into your mind, try to just notice them, maybe name them by saying softly “thinking” and then just simply return to where you were.

If you get annoyed with yourself, bored, anxious etc try the same thing but just name it as “feeling bored.... annoyed.... anxious” etc. If we don’t “feed” the thoughts with a negative story or judgements/worries etc, it is easier to let it go.

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