

STEADY YOUR

NERVOUS SYSTEM

LITE VERSION



STEADY AS SHE GOES

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LET'S SETTLE YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM - QUICKLY

This short guidebook is built for real life (and fried attention spans).

Midlife biology can crank up your stress response, leaving your body in “go mode” even when you’re exhausted. Calming your nervous system helps everything else work better — sleep, focus, digestion, and even how you handle those surprise curveballs midlife loves to throw.

Inside, you’ll learn about the “nervous system ladder” and choose one 60-second reset (like a long exhale, five-senses grounding, a hum, or a cool splash of water) plus one tiny daily anchor (morning light, a short walk, or a protected sleep window). No 47-step routines — just small, evidence-based moves you can actually stick with.

You can read this in about ten minutes, choose your reset and anchor, and start today.

If you’d like to go deeper — with a guide to joyful social connection, delicious mood-supportive recipes, and more tools for emotional steadiness — check out the full Midlife Good Mood Guidebook in my shop: innertravelcoaching.com/store

Science meets self-kindness — for the days you need both.

hi! hello! bonjour!

Polyvagal Theory

Meet your body's security system.

When life gets loud, your nervous system flips between three settings:

- **Connected** (ventral vagal): when you feel safe and social.
- **On alert** (sympathetic): when stress hits (fight/flight states).
- **Powered down** (dorsal vagal): when it's all too much "please let me disappear."

Polyvagal Theory (thanks, Dr. Stephen Porges) is the fancy name for this map. Menopause can make the alarm extra jumpy. Nothing "wrong," just wiring doing its job. This guide shows you how to nudge yourself back to Connected with simple moves, breath, and micro-habits.

AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

SYMPATHETIC

Fight or Flight

In response to perceived threat or danger, the sympathetic nervous system activates to prepare the body for fight or flight. This is an adaptive response to deal with challenges and stressors.

PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

DORSAL VAGAL

Shutdown/Freeze

In situations of extreme threat, the PNS induces a state of freeze. This involves immobilization, dissociation, or shutdown, serving as a protective mechanism in the face of perceived danger.

VENTRAL VAGAL

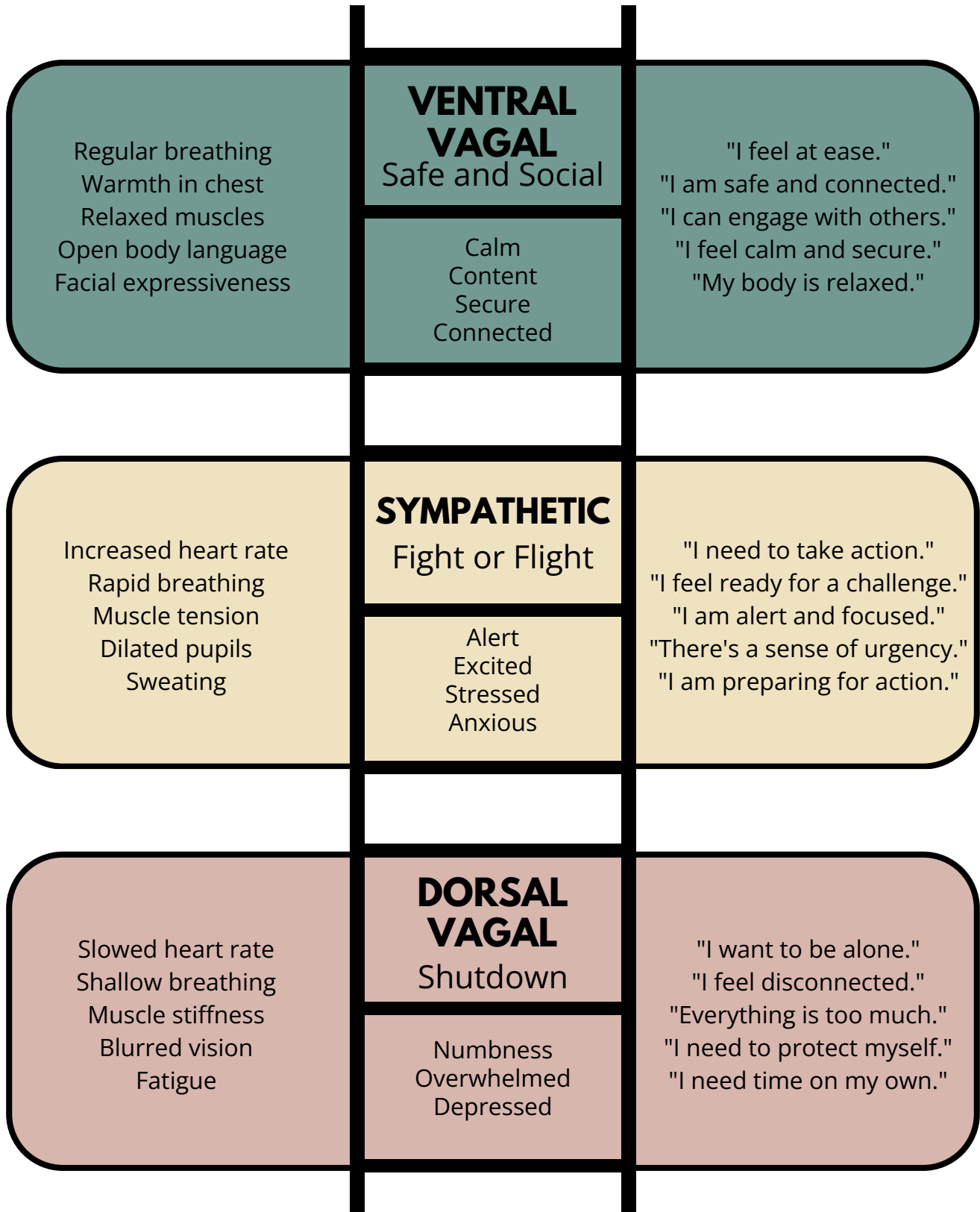
Safe and Social

When we feel safe and connected, the VVC is engaged. This state allows for optimal social interaction, communication, and collaboration. The body is calm, and there's a sense of well-being.

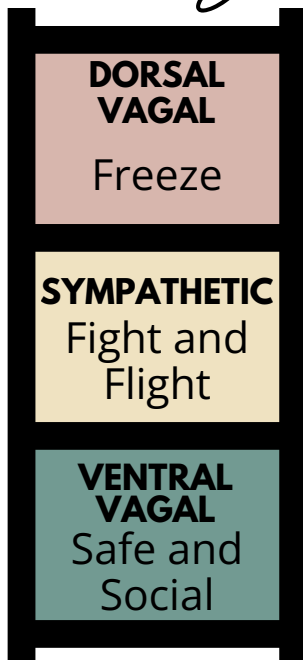
Polyvagal Theory is basically a cheat sheet for your nervous system. It explains why your body flips between wired, worn-out, and connected and how to guide yourself back to calm and connection when life feels like too much.

The Polyvagal Ladder

Cues to determine what state you're in



Self-Regulation Strategies



Practice grounding exercises, gentle movement, and self-soothing activities.

Deep breathing, mindfulness, and physical activity to release excess energy.

Foster positive social connections, practice active listening, engage in joyful activities.

Creating a Personalized Toolkit

Recognize triggers, situations, or stimuli that may activate stress responses.

Try different self-regulation techniques to discover what works best for you.

Integrate self-regulation practices into your daily routine for ongoing stress management.



Body Awareness: Pay attention to physical sensations, especially signs of tension or relaxation.



Breathing Exercises: Practice deep, slow breathing to activate the calming effects of the vagus nerve.



Mindfulness and Meditation: Cultivate a present-moment awareness to regulate emotional responses.



Physical Activity: Engage in regular exercise to release built-up tension and promote overall well-being.



Social Connection: Prioritize positive social interactions to activate the ventral vagal state.



Grounding Techniques: Ground yourself in the present moment with activities like focused attention on the senses.



Establishing Boundaries: Recognize and communicate personal boundaries to maintain a sense of safety.

The Anchor Exercise

Sit or lie down comfortably in a quiet space.

Pay attention to your breath. Notice the natural rhythm of your breathing.

Place one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen. As you breathe in, allow your diaphragm to expand, feeling the hand on your abdomen rise. Focus on deep, diaphragmatic breathing rather than shallow chest breathing.

As you exhale, let the breath out slowly, perhaps even extending the exhalation. This longer exhale helps activate the calming influence of the vagus nerve.

Close your eyes if comfortable. Imagine a place where you feel completely safe, calm, and at ease. It could be a real place or one you create in your mind.

Bring your visualization to life by engaging your senses. What do you see, hear, smell, and feel in this safe place?

Choose a specific anchor, such as placing your hand on your heart or holding onto an object. This physical anchor connects the calming sensations of the exercise with a tangible action.

Continue to focus on your breath and the sensations of safety and calmness. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the present moment.

When you're ready to conclude the exercise, gradually bring your awareness back to the room. Wiggle your fingers and toes, and open your eyes.

This Anchor Exercise is a simple way to calm your body fast. It helps your nervous system switch into safe-and-social mode ... the setting where you feel grounded, connected, and steady. Think of it as a reset button: a few mindful minutes to help your body remember it's safe so your mind can follow.

Journal Prompts

FOR THE FREEZE RESPONSE

Gently spot shutdown patterns and choose tiny steps that bring a bit of movement, care, or contact.

Think about activities that make you feel immobilized or stuck. How do you navigate through these moments and encourage a sense of movement or flow?

Recall a recent experience where you felt overwhelmed and disconnected. How did your body respond in terms of numbness, dissociation, or other shutdown responses?

Reflect on your self-compassion during difficult times. How do you navigate self-critical thoughts and promote a sense of understanding and care?

FOR THE FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE

Use these to notice what flips you into “go-mode,” how your body reacts, and which strategies help.

Think about your response to time pressure and deadlines. How does a sense of urgency impact your stress levels and decision-making?

Describe an activity or task that often leads to heightened stress and urgency. How do you typically cope with the pressure in these situations?

Recall a recent situation that triggered a strong fight or flight response. How did your body react, and what emotions did you experience?

FOR THE SAFE AND SOCIAL RESPONSE

Map what helps you feel safe-enough, present, and connected, so you can do more of it on purpose.

Describe a recent moment where you felt completely at ease in a social setting. What factors contributed to this sense of comfort?

Explore moments when you felt fully present and mindful. What activities or practices helped you stay grounded in the present moment?

Recall a time when you effectively communicated your needs and boundaries. How did this contribute to a positive social experience?

Top 10 PHYSIOLOGY 'SNACKS'

BOOST YOUR MOOD

Boosting your mood doesn't always require major effort. Sometimes, small adjustments to your daily routine can have a significant impact on your emotional well-being. Here are 10 simple physiology hacks that you can incorporate into your day to *instantly* uplift your mood and enhance your overall sense of well-being:

Exercise: *Even a 10-minute walk can increase endorphins.*

Hydrate: *Drink a glass of water to stay refreshed and improve energy.*

Deep Breathing: *Practice deep breathing exercises to reduce stress.*

Sunlight: *Spend time in natural sunlight to boost serotonin levels.*

Healthy Snacks: *Eat mood-boosting foods like nuts or dark chocolate.*

Stretching: *Do some gentle stretching to release tension.*

Cold Water: *Splash your face with cold water to invigorate your senses.*

Posture: *Stand or sit up straight to improve confidence and mood.*

Aromatherapy: *Use essential oils like lavender or citrus for a calming effect.*

Laugh: *Watch a funny video or talk to a friend to release feel-good hormones.*

Ventral Vagal Pathway Activation

Here are 9 ways to promote a sense of calm and activate your ventral vagal pathway:



**DEEP
BREATHING
EXERCISES**



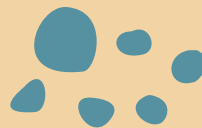
**EXPRESS
GRATITUDE**



**VISUALIZE
A SAFE
SPACE**



**SPEND TIME
WITH
FRIENDS**



**GIVE
YOURSELF A
HUG**



**MEDITATE
MINDFULLY**



**DO SOME
YOGA OR
GO FOR A
WALK**



**LISTEN TO
SOOTHING
MUSIC**



**DRAW,
PAINT OR
WRITE**

TENDING TO YOUR TOOLKIT

You don't need a hundred new habits, just a steady rhythm with the tools you already have here.

Daily, keep it tiny:

- Name your state with the Polyvagal Ladder (ventral / sympathetic / dorsal).
- Do one Self-Regulation Strategy that fits the state you're in.
- Run the Anchor Exercise once (it's your quick reset to "safe-and-social").

Sprinkle in a "physiology snack":

Pick one from the 10 Physiology Snacks list — water, a 10-minute walk, sunlight, a long exhale, a cold splash, a stretch — small acts that shift chemistry and mood.

Write it through when needed:

Choose 1–2 prompts from the state-specific journaling pages (fight/flight, safe & social, or freeze). Two honest lines count.

Build capacity, not perfection:

Grow capacity on purpose: sprinkle a Ventral Vagal Activation — music, connection, gratitude, creative play — into your week. Consistency beats intensity (especially now).

Want the deeper dive? Delicious recipes, a movement plan, and expanded emotional and mood tools?

Grab the **full Good Mood Guidebook** in my shop: <https://innertravelcoaching.com/store>





thank you!

We hope you found this guidebook useful and that it helps you to feel better inside and out.

Follow us below to learn more and stay connected!



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