



Nervous System Hygiene:

Your next level of health

SHIATSU BODYWORKS

Effective
therapy begins
with sensation
not analysis.

What if the root of a defining amount of health issues was the exact same imbalance in the body – nervous system dysregulation?

Modern life places a constant demand on our nervous system often far beyond what it was designed for. We move quickly, think constantly, and rarely pause long enough for the body to register that we are actually safe. Over time, this low-level stress stops feeling like stress at all. It becomes the background we live in.

But the body keeps the score. When the nervous system is continually held in a state of fight or flight, resources are quietly diverted away from the very systems that keep us well—digestion, immunity, repair. This is why supporting the nervous system is no longer a luxury or an “extra”—it has become a foundation for health.

This is why *nervous system hygiene* has become such an important part of modern health. It's not an abstract concept or a wellness trend, but a practical, necessary way of supporting the body in a world that constantly asks more of it than it was designed to give. When the nervous system spends too long in fight-or-flight, the effects ripple through every system of the body. Digestion, sleep, immune function, hormonal balance — all are influenced by whether the body feels safe enough to rest and repair. Over time, this ongoing state of activation can contribute to everyday ill health, and in some cases, to more complex conditions such as autoimmune responses, where the body's protective mechanisms begin to misfire.

There is also a subtle feedback loop at play. When the body remains tense, the breath shallow, and the system on alert, these signals are constantly fed back to the brain as evidence that something isn't right—that we are not safe. The brain responds by maintaining that same protective state. And so, a cycle is created: the body feels under threat, the brain confirms it, and the system stays stuck.

Over time, this can contribute to a wide range of symptoms—from fatigue and digestive issues to anxiety, pain, and inflammatory or autoimmune conditions. From this perspective, these are not random or isolated problems, but signs of a nervous system that hasn't had the opportunity to fully switch off and restore.

What's important to understand is that this pattern is not fixed. The nervous system is constantly adapting, constantly listening to the signals it receives. With the right kind of input — steady, consistent cues of safety — it can begin to shift. This doesn't happen through force or willpower, but through small, repeated experiences that allow the body to recognise that it can let go, even briefly.

In this way, we're not just addressing symptoms as they arise. We're working at the level that underpins them — supporting the body's capacity to regulate itself, to repair, and to function with greater ease. It's a quiet, cumulative process, but one that can have far-reaching effects on both physical and emotional health.

Nervous system hygiene is about building those moments into everyday life. It's about learning to notice when the system is becoming overloaded, and having simple, accessible ways to respond before it escalates. It's not about eliminating stress altogether, but about restoring the body's ability to come back from it — to move fluidly between activation and rest, rather than getting stuck at one end of the spectrum.

How do you know that your nervous system is dysregulated?

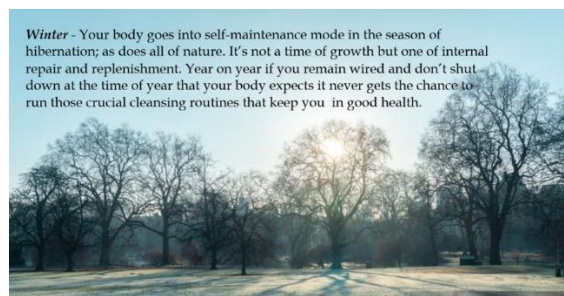
For the symptoms, it helps to reflect how this actually shows up in your day-to-day. Nervous system dysregulation rarely looks like one obvious issue; it tends to be a pattern across your body, mind, and energy levels. **Common signs of nervous system dysregulation**

- Feeling constantly “on edge” or unable to fully relax
- Shallow breathing or frequent sighing
- Difficulty switching off, even when you’re tired
- Poor or disrupted sleep (waking in the night, unrefreshed in the morning)
- Persistent fatigue or energy crashes throughout the day
- Anxiety, overwhelm, or a sense of urgency without a clear reason
- Low mood or feeling flat and unmotivated
- Muscle tension (especially in the neck, shoulders, jaw, or lower back)
- Headaches or migraines
- Teeth grinding or jaw clenching
- Sensitivity to noise, light, or busy environments
- Feeling easily startled or “jumpy”
- Digestive issues (bloating, IBS-type symptoms, constipation or loose stools)
- Loss of appetite or emotional eating
- Hormonal imbalances or irregular cycles
- Lowered immunity (getting ill frequently or taking longer to recover)
- Inflammatory or autoimmune-type conditions
- Brain fog, poor concentration, or forgetfulness
- Feeling disconnected from your body or “not quite here”
- Difficulty making decisions or thinking clearly
- Reliance on caffeine, sugar, or alcohol to regulate energy or mood
- Feeling better when busy, but worse when you stop
- Difficulty resting without guilt or restlessness

Yes, it’s quite a list but it shows how wide-ranging a nervous system imbalance can cast. It affects your whole health in body and mind. You may recognise a few of these, or many. What matters isn’t the number, but the pattern—your nervous system may simply be asking for support.

When I ask people about whether they've tried meditation or yoga and the response is: 'it's too slow or boring or I couldn't switch off'. This indicates that their nervous system is wired and they're not able to handle slowing down. If you can relax and watch a calm film for 2 hours in the evening without checking your phone – your nervous system is in a good place. If you sleep through the night and wake refreshed, you're in a good place. If you handle challenges and triggers throughout the day and can shrug it off and enjoy your evening – yep, you're in a good place. Many of us though can't say yes to all 3 of these (me included!). This is okay – we're all in the same space but we all want to get to a safer place:

To be at home and enjoying the simplest pleasures – nature, your animals, eating dinner, sleeping; these are where we want to get our nervous system too and with everyday small habits you can start to rebuild a calmer more regulated nervous system.



Emotion Regulation for Nervous System Regulation

It's not about being calm and collected all the time but about range and repertoire. What if regulation isn't about helping you stay calm... but about helping you stay available? For complexity and discomfort?

You're taught you should be able to control your feelings with breathing but it's actually about having the ability to adapt – to be flexible and regulate again after something has happened and if lucky become so practised at switching out of a *flight state* that you do this effortlessly when something does trigger you.

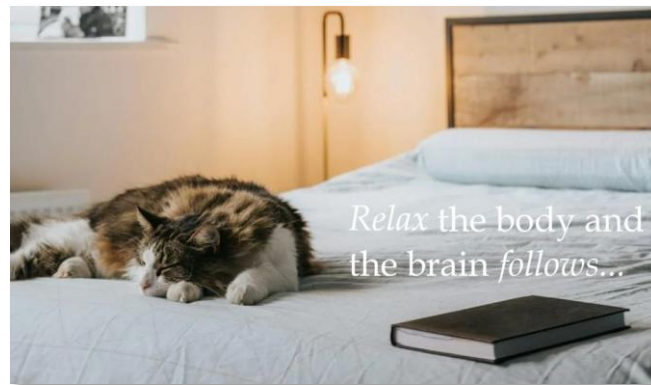
A regulated nervous system is not being calm all the time; and there are times when you shouldn't be calm. It is about how you help yourself when you know you've been through something and you want to then switch back into a relaxed state rather than remain stuck and ruminate. If your mind remains in this state, it's telling your body that danger is still present and to remain in a heightened state.



Did you know that it's *your body* that tells *your mind* when you are safe?

Most people think that you need to calm the mind to calm the body - not so!

Your body informs your mind when you are safe – this is important to know.



This puts the emphasis on *your relationship with your body* to regulate your nervous system and not an internal conversation with your mind.

How to calm your nervous system via your body

Simple everyday supportive and practical nervous-system – regulating tools

In doing some of these things every day (especially when calm) you give your body a memory that it can return to. For example, upon waking scrunching your toes and just letting yourself breathe naturally for a few minutes before jumping out of bed. Attaching a new routine to when you're cleaning your teeth or putting the kettle on. *To create new habits attach them to current habits.*

Embarking on nervous system regulation is exactly the same exercise for your body as muscle memory. If you've ever done anything physical like tennis or golf to pottery or knitting you learn where to place your hands to create a perfect swing to a perfect pot! Your body learns through repetition exactly what to do without you having to think it. A complex example of this is driving and you can learn regulation in exactly the same way.

These new exercises are just the same - just a couple of minutes a few times every day is going to help your body learn what safe feels like.

Telling yourself to calm down and just breathe in a situation - doesn't work; *your body needs to already know what to do* and this comes with practise.

Employing these one by one and creating daily habit sends a stable signal from body to brain that you are safe - and safety triggers nervous system relaxation.:

1. **Scrunch your toes** – this is a great one when you're in an environment that is triggering but you can't escape (i.e. a boardroom table) . I also do this on waking first thing in the morning and you can also do to help you sleep but read #2. This triggers the parasympathetic breath (the relaxing one). In Shiatsu

we have meridian extensions that run through the pad just below the toes – Lung and Large Intestine. In scrunching your toes, you trigger this pair of reactions in the body: *breath* plus *letting go* equals parasympathetic breath.

2. **Full body muscle releasing** – similar to above but throughout the body – fantastic to do at bedtime or if you wake with tension in the night (even do it if you don't know you have tension); you do this lying down. Starting with the toes then the calves' thighs pelvic region belly chest arms and shoulders. In turn scrunch each set of muscles as tightly as you can hold and release. You should feel noticeably heavier and softer. This in turn tells the brain you are relaxed allowing the brain to switch back into a resting state. You can repeat until you feel the benefits.
3. **Gentle belly button pulling** – in towards spine and upwards in one long slow movement. This will trigger a diaphragm release and parasympathetic breath AND do this regularly overtime and it's said to tighten up your belly too – win win. I find this easier to do when lying on my side (if in bed).
4. **Healing Breathing** –Japanese breathing techniques

Deeply rooted in martial arts and Zen traditions, are designed to bridge the mind and body, shifting the nervous system into the resting state, allowing for self-healing and deep relaxation. There are many breathing techniques around but you specifically want a calming one and this requires two things:

- ✓ *The focus* on the lower abdomen rather than shallow chest breathing – but note whether your rib cage expands (it should).
- ✓ *Long Exhalations*: The exhale is generally longer than the inhale, which is crucial for calming the Vagus nerve and lowering heart rate.

The goal is to move from a chaotic state to a "still" state, reducing mental chatter and bringing the body into equilibrium.

If you notice you are a good belly breather but that your rib cage doesn't expand in all directions you have a breathing issue. From either a congested diaphragm to an emotional shutdown. The Lungs in Chinese medicine hold grief (any kind of) and you may have developed shallow breathing without realising it. Shiatsu can supportively help you address this.

There are more developed breathing styles but any that are energising or ask you to forcefully breath are not right for nervous system calming. Breath work has to be very careful around any kind of trauma. In shiatsu and somatic therapies, we watch and work with the breath and do not force it where it's not ready or feeling safe to go.

Simple tip – if the *inhalation* is longer than *exhalation* this is energising breath and will stimulate you.

4b. **Create your yawns** – with an 'arrrrrh'! Saying an exaggerated R over and over can trigger yawning – this is a letting go mechanism. Probably one done better in private but also fun to do with your dog too. Release tension for both of you with this little extra breathing trick!

5. **Shaking** – Animals shake in the wild after a near miss as do your own dogs - this shakes out the trauma they've just felt – they've let it go before it can embed. However, shut down dogs don't do this

and nor do humans now. I've taught my dog to shake it off by doing it for her; now she does it with a voice command of 'let it go' and sometimes a supportive touch. Humans however have lost this ability; but you can learn to shake. Shaking releases chronic tension patterns and trauma held in the body's fascia and muscles, leaving you feeling deeply relaxed and your nervous system calmed.

You may even feel you want to try shaking; so, either with my help or watching **TRE videos** on YouTube you can have a go:

- ✓ Lie down on a slightly firm surface (like a rug) arms softly by your sides
- ✓ Pull your knees up so your feet are flat on the ground
- ✓ Note your breathing (use #4 as required)
- ✓ Allow your body to move – this is the important part – *allow...*
- ✓ You may shake through the pelvis, legs, chest, shoulders, yawn, stretch or unwind. Your body may move in ways you didn't know were possible just stay calm and allow. Your body knows what it is doing; trust it you will feel the better for it afterwards. You may cry or feel joyous and energised!

We spend so much time controlling our body with our mind that to lie down and allow your body to move in ways you didn't know about can feel strange. This is your body using its innate wisdom to release stored trauma and tension. Some clients start to do this naturally in treatments. In the TRE method they do show you how to use stress exercises to kick start the process. I prefer to allow your body if it wants to do this naturally then this is a good regulator.



6. **Unwinding – Bamboo in the Wind.** This is just one of many forms in Qi Gong. Known as meditation through movement Qi Gong (a forerunner of Tai Chi) is the art of breath (and therefore regulation) through movement of the body. If you find you can't *just breathe* or meditate and restorative (slow yoga) isn't your thing then Qi Gong just maybe a good fit. As well as the health benefits of circulation breathing mind clarity and more this one will help strengthen your body too. The unwinding is a specific stance to help your body do a gentler form of letting go than shaking. In the Qi Gong stance just allow your body to sway gently and then you may feel yourself wanting to move in certain ways – allow this. This is unwinding and the more you do for your body the more you will help your mind. We become physically inflexible when the mind does; now you can turn this around. I always recommend Holden Qi Gong on YouTube as a good starting place. There is also specific Qi Gong to aid sleep.



Qigong Shaking for Stress Relief Lee Holden Qi Gong in Relaxing Yosemite

7. **Nourish your nervous system** – Often a lack of vital minerals is the cause of your nervous system issues especially so through perimenopause and menopause. As progesterone declines women don't handle stress as well causing high cortisol levels. Cortisol then uses up what nutrition is available and leaves you with symptoms like joint pains brain fog and anxiety. Beneficial vitamins like B6 D3 and Magnesium will feed your body what it needs. However, don't take them in isolation they need support – this comes in the form of a good multivitamin; with additional vitamin D3 and Magnesium. Get my [supplements guide here](#) or ask me for advice.



8. **Saying no (creating boundaries)** – only say Yes to those things you sincerely want to do otherwise they play on your mind; stress comes from deciding how to avoid doing. Say no straight away to something and you'll realise how much stress you've just avoided and time/ peace of mind you've regain.
9. **Hydrate fascia to release your body** - nutrients food and shiatsu. Hydration isn't solely about water it's about this water (with nutrients) reaching the right parts of your body. Your thirst is much smarter than you realise and to be thirsty can mean your body is actually wanting minerals called electrolytes. Without these your kidneys struggle to regulate a lot of bodily functions and other symptoms may include:

- 💧 Dizziness upon standing - lack of sodium
- 💧 Urine is a dark colour; by lunchtime it should be quite pale
- 💧 Headaches esp. midbrow - dehydration in Chinese medicine
- 💧 Tiredness not resolved by sleep - nutrient depletion
- 💧 Constipation - lack of water to the large intestine
- 💧 Muscle cramps - lack of sodium chloride/ magnesium

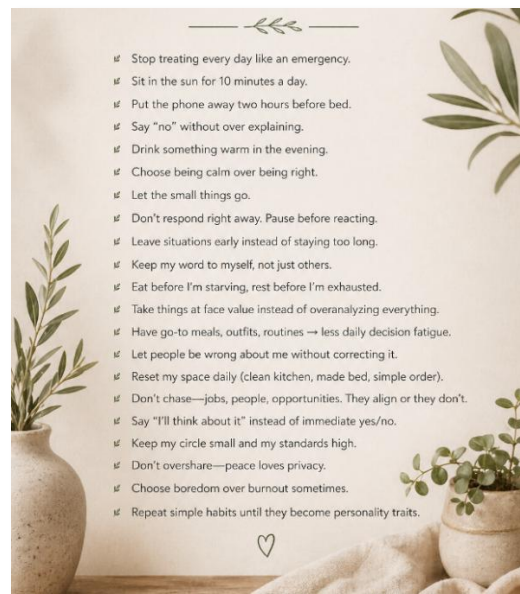
Your fascia and nervous system are interrelated. Hydration governs the quality of your fascia and the better it flows the more relaxed you will feel. This is why Shiatsu can help; it physically releases these blockages. If your joints sound clicky or creaky – this is dehydration.

In working your spine and back shiatsu supports the *water meridians* of kidney and bladder. A happy kidney channel promotes a better homeostasis in the body (i.e. balances fluids/electrolytes). The Bladder meridian IS your nervous system and in working the points slowly (with your breath) can

release tension held in the organs, deepen your breathing naturally and calm your mind (new *Nervous System Regulation Shiatsu* technique).

10. **Embrace simplicity** - Consistency beats intensity. Regularity reminds your body to switch to resting more easily.

Everything I've shown you today should feel comfortable to; do never force as this means your body isn't ready. If you find anything is uncomfortable you can discuss this with me in a session or just know that now is not the right time for this. Your nervous system is your body and your body knows when it's starting to feel safe. Yes, you can help yourself do this and yes you can push yourself but don't ever force. If you have a reaction or it just doesn't feel right *listen to your body as it's telling you*.



How and why Shiatsu (sympathetic bodywork) work

Insight alone doesn't change the nervous system because here's what's happening:

The body holds what the mind cannot process.

When you're experiencing chronic stress or unresolved emotional patterns, this energy gets stored in the nervous system. No amount of talking will release what's living in the soft tissue – the muscles organs and fascia.

Fascia isn't just a structural tissue - It's a sensory and regulatory system that constantly communicates with your Nervous System, which means if the Nervous System stays in a protective or stressed state, fascial tone remains elevated even when you're "doing all the right things."

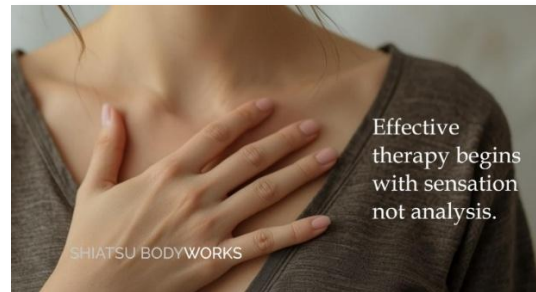
Releasing fascia can change things that you're not even targeting when you come for a shiatsu treatment – your posture can improve and your breathing may become deeper without forcing it and chronic tension softens in time. Movement becomes easier with inflammation and puffiness reduced. This doesn't happen overnight but with consistency



and understanding. *Emotional release is also something that happens with fascia work.*

Aggressive stretching isn't the answer as fascia tends to respond better to slow inputs that improve circulation, hydration and safety signals in the body. Fascial health and nervous system regulation go hand in hand; and you get this with shiatsu.

Further reading: [Is your body holding trauma?](#)



About Andrea at Shiatsu Bodyworks Cheltenham

Andrea is a qualified Zen shiatsu and Chinese medicine practitioner with over 20 years immersed in holistic therapies and the energetics of mind and body. With further studies and practical work in pelvic rebalancing nervous system regulation somatic breathwork Bach flower remedies and Pharmacognosy with essential oils she calls on her extensive tool kit to support you.

Based in Cheltenham, UK she offers in house clinic and online shiatsu sessions to help people with midlife health issues and also offers online consultations as she is a menopause specialist too.

Ready for a treatment? [Book in here!](#)

