

Creating Stillness for the Autonomic Nervous System

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Before we get out of bed in the morning, our mind is often already beginning to plan and organize. What am I going to have for breakfast? When am I going to have time to do all the things on my to do list? Then we may grab our phone and look at the emails from overnight before our feet even touch the floor.



What does all this activity do to our nervous system? It creates stress. Our autonomic nervous system is designed with two modes. One mode is our sympathetic mode, also known as fight, flight or freeze. The other mode is our parasympathetic mode, also known as rest, digest, and repair.

Our sympathetic mode reacts to daily stress and keeps our system on high alert. Do we have a tiger chasing us? For most of us, probably not. This mode is designed to protect us from danger. It is very beneficial when we are in danger of a physical attack, a major loss, or an accident.

However, when our body stays in the sympathetic mode, there may be an unwanted change in our breathing, blood pressure I heartbeat, digestion, sleep cycles, and physical health. Over an extended period of time, this can be very exhausting for the physical body and our emotional state; it can create increased anxiety or depression.

I had three bulging discs several years ago. At the time of onset, my sympathetic mode went on high alert. My physical body went into protection to prevent further injury. The muscles tightened in my lower back, pulling on my neck and head. My body was trying to protect those discs that were out of place. I suddenly became hyper aware of my internal structure. Even picking up a glass of water or brushing my teeth was very painful. I remember thinking how cautious I had become to do even the simplest of movements. In the sympathetic mode, my body was doing its job to protect me.

However, after a few weeks and decreasing inflammation, I was still cautious. I was afraid the pain might reoccur. What if I moved the wrong way or did the wrong thing, would it come back? This was my autonomic nervous system still being on high alert. Over time, this created a bit of depression from not being able to return fully to my fast-paced life.

I then called my friend, who is a craniosacral therapist and I began receiving CranioSacral Therapy (CST) treatments a couple of times per week. CST allowed my body to slowly shift out of the sympathetic mode and into the parasympathetic mode. This shift allowed my body to move into healing and repair at a quicker pace.

My doctor, at the time, was surprised at how quickly my body was recovering from the bulging discs. He said, "this is only your first time for this happening." I thought to myself, first time? He mentioned that it can happen repetitively after it occurs once. This was a "story" that I did not want my body to repeat. Through the use CST, I was able to develop a new "story" for my body and keep the spine and dural tube mobile.

Another strategy I use to work with my own autonomic nervous system is to lie on a simple device called the **Still Point Inducer™**, which has been shown to create soothing Still Points like those achieved when receiving CranioSacral Therapy. A still point is when the craniosacral rhythm gradually comes into stillness. When the craniosacral rhythm comes into stillness it allows the system to go into



rest, digest, and repair mode. During this deep state of relaxation, our anxiety level goes down, heart rate goes to resting, breathing softens, and muscles relax. It is similar to when you are in a meditative state. A still point has been shown to help reduce fevers, chronic pain, hyperactivity, nausea, and discomfort during labor and delivery. It has also been shown to increase overall vitality.

When my mind feels overactive, I take 10 - 15 minutes to lie on my still point inducer. I get up feeling refreshed and move forward with ease. I keep the still

point inducer in my nightstand so if I have trouble sleeping, I can easily access it. The still point inducer allows my body to drop into stillness and fall asleep.

What are some other ways to assist helping your autonomic nervous system into stillness? Firstly, notice when you are feeling stressed, have more anxiety, or cannot sleep. This is your body telling you it may be in the fight, flight, or freeze mode. Engaging in regular self care, such as regular still point inducer use, throughout your day and week is highly beneficial to your overall health.

When you first wake up in the morning, mention five things you are grateful for and feel that in your body. When we are in a place of feeling gratitude it changes our internal chemistry. Allow your body to feel it in every cell. It can be as simple as being grateful for waking up that morning, having a bed to sleep in, the covers that keep you warm, being able to take a breath, etc.

Being in nature is another excellent way to shift and assist your nervous system. Going for a walk in nature amongst trees or along a beach, lying on the ground/grass/sand as we did as kids, and watching the clouds go by allows your body to drop into stillness. When we return to a playful curious mind, it allows our body to relax.

Other strategies that I have used include meditation and breath-work. One that I use is focusing on my breath without trying to change it, just noticing my breath go in/out, in/out, in/out. By doing this, it allows my body to drop into stillness.

All the suggestions above are things I have used and work for me personally – some only take 5 - 10 minutes. You can even do them while you are in line at the grocery store, focusing on your breath. The more you incorporate the strategies that work for your body, you may find you have more time. The body becomes less stressed and able to function at a new productive level.

Have fun while trying new strategies. If we look at them as a chore or another thing to add to our list, then it keeps our sympathetic chain elevated. When I lie on my still point inducer for 10 - 15 minutes and feel calmer and more relaxed after, it encourages my system to remember that state. As I move forward throughout my day in a calmer state of mind, things appear to be easier. I know we each can have daily stress, but we can also have a toolbox of great strategies to allow those stressful moments to glide by with ease. Have fun and be gentle with yourself.

[CLICK HERE](#) for more information or to purchase a Still Point Inducer™.