

Understanding your nervous system

Have you ever felt your heart racing before a big event or your stomach tightening when you are stressed? That is your nervous system doing its job. Understanding how this system works helps us recognise when it is being overprotective and how to help it find balance.

YOUR TWO KEY SYSTEMS

ALERT SYSTEM

- The Sympathetic Nervous System
- Acts like an internal alarm
 - Prepares your body for action
 - Releases energy quickly
 - Focuses on protection
 - Switches off digestion

CALMING SYSTEM

- The Parasympathetic Nervous System
- Works like a brake pedal
 - Helps rest and recovery
 - Conserves energy
 - Supports digestion
 - Promotes feeling safe

Your body naturally shifts between alert and calm, but anxiety can make it harder to dial down the alert system.

HOW ANXIETY SHOWS UP

IN YOUR BODY

- Heart beats faster
- Breathing gets quick and shallow
- Muscles tense
- Stomach feels unsettled
- Body temperature changes
- Energy surges

IN YOUR FEELINGS

- Feeling on edge, racing mind
- Worrying about everything
- Worried about how much you worry
- Feeling overwhelmed or irritable

IN YOUR ACTIONS

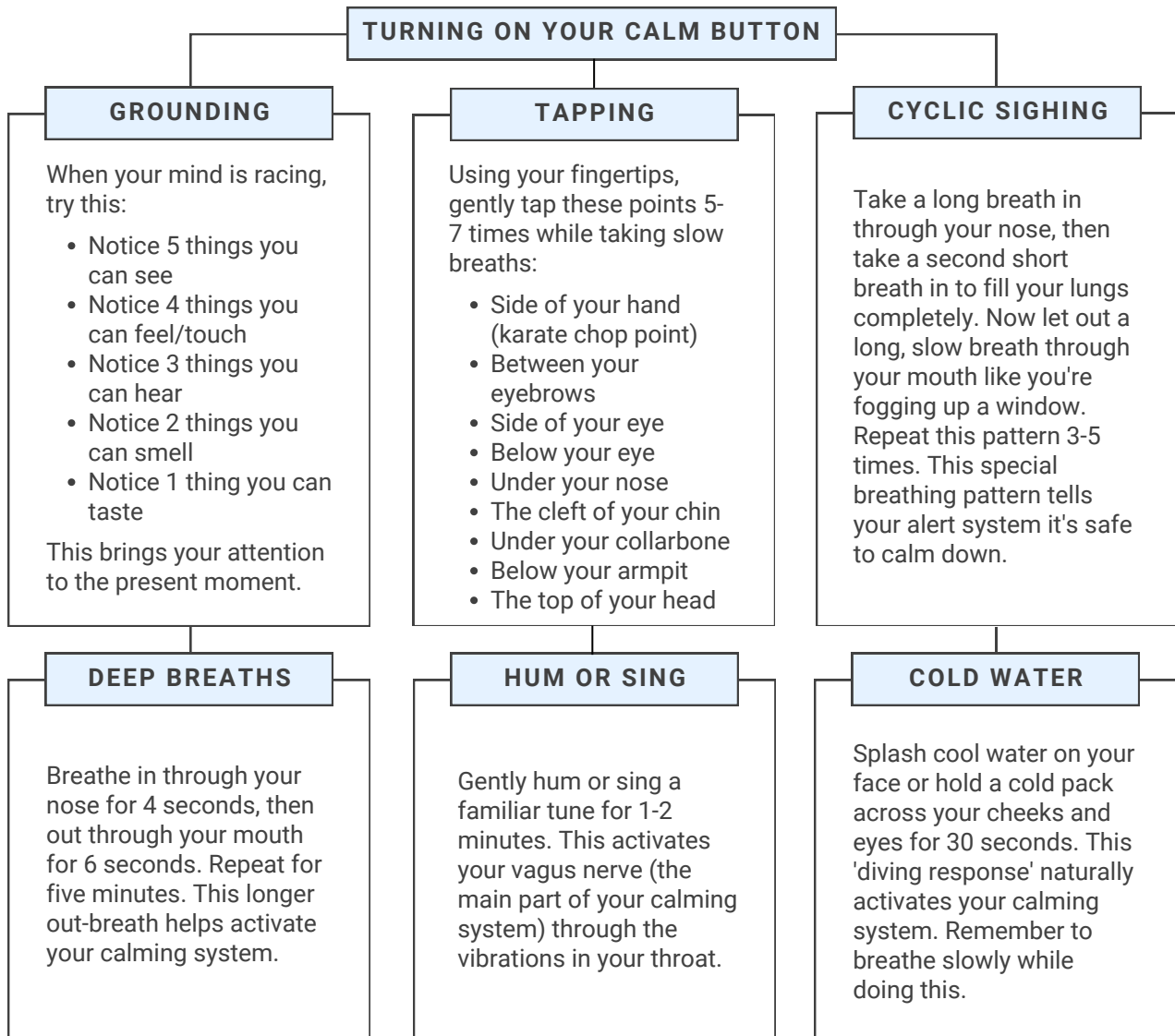
- Moving quickly, avoiding
- Difficulty sitting still
- Quick decisions
- Trouble sleeping
- Hard to remember things
- Putting things off

Anxiety is not a sign of weakness. Your system is doing what it is designed to do – we just need to teach it how to turn the volume down when the danger is not real.

THE CALM BUTTON

One of the main players in calming your nervous system is the vagus nerve. It connects your brain to your heart, lungs, and gut. When it is active, it helps you feel safe and settled. Simple things like slow breathing, humming, or gentle movement can stimulate the vagus nerve and support your calm system.

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These strategies work directly with your nervous system. They might feel unusual at first, but with practice, they are useful tools for settling your alert system.

SEEKING SUPPORT

If anxiety is making it hard to go about your day, sleep, or enjoy life, you don't have to face it alone. Talking to a therapist or GP can help you learn more tools and find support that works for you.