Tips for Regulating your Nervous System and Enhancing your Well-Being during Challenging Times

Consider yourself as a mature tree. Storms come - leaves fall. some branches break. But you are grounded, with deep roots. You sustain your balance. If you are a younger tree, with roots that are less well-established, someone might stake your shaky trunk with ropes so, once again, you can grow upright.

From my personal experience and the work I have done with clients for over 40 years, I have come up with the following list of practices that you may find helpful for stress management. The "preventative" list names some that can help you maintain your balance so you are less likely to be knocked off-course. But since we get triggered all the time, the "as needed" list will help you rebalance when you do lose your equilibrium. Add whatever you have found works for you.

Preventative

A. The Basics*: *Taking care of our bodies and brain. *(You probably know most of these, but we often neglect ourselves when we have a lot to deal with.)*

- Prioritize getting enough sleep
- Take rest breaks throughout the day
- Minimize sugar and alcohol and eat real (less-processed), nourishing foods
- Drink a lot of water (How many ounces? It is suggested to aim for half our body weight)
- Use movement to release stress (dance, stretch, walk…) Take breaks from sitting.
- Breathe slowly and deeply (Try breathing in for the count of 4, hold for the count of 4 and breathe out to the count of 8.)
- Find ways to nourish your spirit with nature, beauty, art, music, connection to others, joy
- Find and experience deep attunement: Listen to your inner feelings, share authentically, and listen deeply to others. We cannot thrive if we don't 'feel felt.'

B. ***Mirror Neurons*** – Neuroscientists have discovered that we pick up others' stress and anxiety through their energy and tone. Be discerning of what you are ingesting from others. Is it nourishing or dysregulating? On the other hand, if you are able to keep yourself in balance, you can help others through 'co-regulation.'

C. ***Conscious Consumption of Information.*** Stay informed but take care that you do not let yourself become inundated to the point of becoming overwhelmed.

- *Prepare yourself for reading potentially unsettling information*. One way of preparing yourself is to try to stay embodied. What I mean by this is to ground yourself - feel your feet on the ground, feel your seat on the chair, feel your breath in and out. Consider this metaphor: Keep one foot solidly grounded before the other foot forays into something potentially stressful.

- *Metabolize what you are experiencing.* Take a few minutes to tune into your reactions and identify what you are feeling: tension, fear, anger, numbness, overwhelm, hopelessness, helplessness, grief … Try to simply accept whatever you are feeling. Resisting 'what is' creates tension in us and causes disharmony in our systems and we lose energy. As Tara Brach suggests, ask yourself: "What is here now, and can I be with it with kindness and compassion?"

I offer some tools below that may help you befriend your experience and soothe and calm your nervous system. There are numerous experts offering books, articles, webinars and YouTube videos. The list below represents some of my favorites.

Note - you can't alleviate stress by THINKING your way to relief. Instead, calming one's nervous system needs to be experiential.

As-Needed **Tools for Stress Relief and Nervous System Regulation**

A. Focus on your breathing, intentionally. Take 3 slow deep breaths; make the exhalation longer than the inhalation. Or sigh.

B. Use "Tapping" for stress relief. Tapping, or Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), involves tapping specific points on your body while focusing on an emotion or issue you want to release https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TnbRcO43CD8 (Taught and Guided by Nick Ortner). Also see: What Is Eft Tapping? How To Do It and Benefits

C. Give yourself the gift of openhearted awareness and self-compassion.
   - Name what you're feeling, with kindness. We know how comforting it feels when someone else 'gets' us. "I can hear how worried, sad, frustrated… you are. That makes sense." Can you do that for yourself? Name the emotions. "I see you" (soft voice). "I get it." "It's OK."

   - A loving-kindness practice that I find helpful is by Kristen Neff. This version helps you generate compassion for a mistake, perceived inadequacy or a moment of suffering. When you are feeling down, in pain, or suffering in some way, consider saying to yourself the following:

This is a moment of suffering (anxiety, grief…).
Suffering is part of life. Just like me, there are many people who are suffering right now.
May I be kind to myself in this moment.
May I give myself the compassion I need.

5. Gentle, warm self-touch can feel extremely nourishing - for example, putting your hand on your heart or "Havening". Hand on Heart is simply literally placing one hand on the center of your chest next to your heart and the other hand on top of the first hand. Notice how soothing that feels. *Havening* is a newer set of self-touch practices that some find extremely calming. Try this 5-minute guidance. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBer8wHmH7M

Suggested Resources

Similarly, there are huge numbers of books and webinars one can draw from when finding yourself in a state of anxiety or overwhelm with what is happening around you. A few of my favorites are:

- *The Basics: Deb Dana Explains Polyvagal Theory* in "Befriending your Nervous System" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxpxyzZx_rw

- Kennedy, Russell (2020). Anxiety Rx: A new prescription for Anxiety Relief. I found this book so helpful! It covers topics such as the roots of anxiety, the connection between the body and mind, and techniques to sever the connection between the somatic alarm and anxious thoughts.

- "Resilient Presence: Cultivating Inner Strength & Connection in Challenging Times" https://www.whole-beingwellness.com/event-welcome/?utm_campaign=83922146-WBL+2025&utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9ucFE6dehbyF0sa4RXN47lUVbe3KjW86_oWIEMSMrG8OL12OEnCdCDG3hBK0RG_xHY5k1cfaeng0cor3aMYzXI5hdt27g2VyVQRJibC9PPtztM9bI&_hsmi=108324074&utm_content=108324074&utm_source=hs_automation

- Meditation Training with *Jack Kornfield & Tara Brach* - FREE https://www.soundstrue.com/products/mindfulness-daily

- *Rick Hanson* – "What to do when the bottom falls out" https://rickhanson.com/meditation-talk-4-ways-we-can-respond-after-the-election/

- Equanimity Meditation (Hanson) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuWii4rLZbk