

The Nervous System: A Simple Overview

Our nervous system is the communication highway of the body. It constantly helps us sense, respond, and interact with the world around us.

Two Main Parts:

- **Central Nervous System (CNS)** – the brain and spinal cord
- **Peripheral Nervous System (PNS)** – the network of nerves outside the brain and spine

The peripheral system is further divided into:

- **Voluntary Nervous System** – controls conscious movement (e.g. walking, writing)
- **Autonomic Nervous System** – manages automatic functions (e.g. breathing, digestion, heartbeat)

The Sympathetic Nervous System (Fight or Flight)

The **sympathetic system** is what kicks in when the body perceives a threat or stressor. It activates our "**fight or flight**" response.

This system:

- Increases heart rate and breathing
- Raises blood pressure
- Pumps out stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol
- Mobilises energy so you can run, fight, or stay alert

It's your **emergency response mode**, designed to keep you safe. But when it stays activated for too long (like during chronic stress or anxiety), it can become exhausting and dysregulating.

The Parasympathetic Nervous System (Rest and Digest)

The **parasympathetic nervous system** helps bring the body back into a state of calm after stress. It's responsible for **rest, recovery, and repair** — the essential functions that keep us well over time.

When this system is activated, it:

- Slows the heart rate
- Supports digestion
- Boosts immune function
- Promotes rest, healing, and deep sleep

This is often called the "**rest and digest**" state — a mode where the body feels **safe, grounded, and able to recharge**.

Both Systems Are Important

We need **both** systems to stay healthy and balanced.

- One helps us **respond to danger or challenges**
- The other helps us **recover and restore**

The issue is when we become **stuck** in one mode - especially **sympathetic overdrive** (anxiety, hypervigilance, burnout).

A Helpful Analogy

If you've spent time with dogs, you've probably seen this in action: They will become alert, hunt or bark in one moment, then will quickly shake off those feelings and return to calm.

They shift smoothly between activation and rest.

Humans, however, often **struggle to switch off**.

This is when herbs and body movement can support us to reset the nervous system after stressful events.