



Know your Life's Stressors

WORKBOOK

gentles STRENGTH
WELLNESS

**OUR BODIES
ARE DESIGNED
FOR STRESS ...
BUT, NOT TOO
MUCH**

Stress is inevitable and a part of our everyday lives. In fact, half of our autonomic nervous system, known as the Sympathetic Nervous System (famous for activating our “fight or flight” response), is designed to support us in the daily activities that cause us stress. While the other half, the Parasympathetic Nervous System (responsible for promoting our “rest and digest” response), is designed to help us to recover from the stressors of our daily life.



So, the goal isn't to eliminate stress altogether but rather to ensure that we are giving ourselves the time and space necessary to counterbalance the effects of stress by activating our parasympathetic nervous system. In other words, we aim to pulse between times of stress and times of relaxation. Too often we get stuck in a stress cycle that keeps our bodies tense and prevents our minds from integrating and letting go of challenging experiences.



List 3 stressors in your life that you feel are in the way of you achieving your optimal health.

Thinking about these stressors, where do you feel it most in your body? What sensations do you feel?



Now list 3 things that you do daily (or regularly) that make you feel relaxed.

Thinking about these relaxing things/activities, where do you feel it most in your body? What sensations do you feel?

Tips to activate your Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS)

- **Drink water.** Stay hydrated. When you drink water and often, you are signalling to your body that you are in a safe environment because if you were under threat or in danger, your body knows that drinking water is the last thing you would do.
- **Breathing exercises.** Rapid, shallow chest breathing is a sign of stress, while slow, deep belly breathing is a sign of rest, which activates the PNS.
- **Sleeping on your side.** This helps improve your heart rate variability levels, and most interestingly, sleeping on the right side was found to be the best for vagal modulation.
- **Gargling.** When you do this, it requires activation of the three pharyngeal muscles at the back of the throat, which stimulate the vagus nerve through muscle activation.
- **Meditation and mindfulness practices.** This requires you to take the time and make an effort to pay attention to what you are doing and what is happening around you.
- **Touch.** For example, touching your lips. Gently run one or two of your fingers over your lips. Your lips have parasympathetic nerve fibres spread throughout them, so touching them activates the body's relaxation response.
- **Yoga and stretching.** Set a regular schedule for these gentle exercises, for example, first thing in the morning or right before you get ready for bed.
- **Cold showers.** Repeated exposure to cold water significantly reduces the defensive response from the body. As you repeat your cold water exposures, your body prolongs the need to instigate your fight, flight and freeze response (sympathetic nervous response) and this approach is then brought into your daily life.