

Nervous System Care Cards



A 39-Card Deck
by
The Simplified Self

A gentle note before you begin

You're the expert on you. Use what helps and remember it's okay to skip what doesn't.

You can stop anytime if something doesn't feel right.

If something comes up, or you're finding things hard, please reach out to a qualified professional.

If you need support right now, you can contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 in Australia. In the US and Canada, call or text 988.

findahelpline.com can help wherever you are.

For educational purposes. Not a substitute for therapy or medical advice. Always use cards somewhere you can safely pause. Don't use while driving, operating machinery or doing anything that needs your full attention.

5-4-3-2-1 GROUNDING

Reconnect with the here & now



TRY THIS

Name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can physically feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Giving your attention something concrete to notice can help shift your focus towards your present surroundings.

TIP

A mint can give you an easy taste anchor when you need one.

FINGER TRACE BREATHING



Follow your
breath with your
finger



TRY THIS

Hold one hand open. Slowly trace up one finger as you breathe in, and down as you breathe out. Continue around your hand at a comfortable pace.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Combining breathing with gentle touch and movement gives your attention a simple rhythm to follow.

TIP

Let the tracing match your natural breath. There's no need to slow it down or finish the whole hand.

COOLING PAUSE

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, tilted downwards, with her eyes closed and hands cupped under her chin, splashing water. The water is captured in mid-air, creating a dynamic and refreshing scene. The background is softly blurred, emphasizing the woman and the water.

A cool cue when
things feel intense



TRY THIS

Splash cool water over your face, or place a wrapped cool pack across your cheeks for around 20–30 seconds.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Cooling your face can affect some of the body's automatic responses and may help shift how activated you feel.

TIP

No cool pack?
A cool, damp cloth can work too.

ALTERNATING TAPS



TRY THIS

Tap your left knee, then your right knee, alternating slowly for up to 1 minute. Notice the rhythm and sensation of each tap.

WHY IT MAY HELP

The repetitive left-right rhythm gives your attention a simple sensory focus. Some people find this steadying or grounding.

TIP

If you like, hum a familiar tune while you tap for another steady rhythm to follow.

THE 90-SECOND PAUSE



Give the feeling
a little room



TRY THIS

Set a timer for 90 seconds. Let your breathing stay comfortable. Notice what you're feeling without needing to fix it. Remind yourself: "I can give myself a moment before I decide what to do next."

WHY IT MAY HELP

A brief pause can create some space between a strong feeling and what you do next. Emotions can shift over time, even when they don't disappear straight away.

TIP

Does 90 seconds feel too long? Start with 30. The pause still counts.

NAME WHAT'S HERE



Put a few words
around what
you're feeling



TRY THIS

Pause and put a name to what you notice: "I'm noticing that I feel angry." Say it quietly, think it, or write it down.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Putting feelings into words can help you make sense of what you're experiencing and may create a little more room before you respond.

TIP

Can't find the right feeling word? Describe what you notice instead: tight, heavy, restless, warm, blank, or simply "something feels off".

PHYSIOLOGICAL SIGH



A longer exhale
when you need
a moment



TRY THIS

Breathe in comfortably through your nose, then take a second, smaller inhale. Slowly breathe out through your mouth.

Repeat once or twice if it feels comfortable.

WHY IT MAY HELP

The longer exhale may help slow your breathing and support a settling response.

TIP

Keep the second inhale small. Think “little top-up”, not another full breath.

SELF-COMPASSION PAUSE



Offer yourself the
kindness you'd
give someone you
care about



TRY THIS

Rest a hand somewhere that feels comforting, perhaps over your chest or on your upper arm. Say: "This is hard. I'm allowed to find this hard. Can I be a little kinder to myself right now?"

WHY IT MAY HELP

Self-compassion can soften self-criticism and support a kinder, more workable response when things feel difficult.

TIP

If the words feel forced, it's okay to change them to something that feels more comforting.

SCRIPTED TIME-OUT



Pause the conversation



TRY THIS

Say: “I care about this, and I want to talk about it properly. I need a little time to settle. Can we pause and come back to this at [time]?”

WHY IT MAY HELP

A short pause can give emotional intensity time to ease, making it easier to respond more thoughtfully.

TIP

Agree beforehand on what “pause” means, including how you’ll signal it and when you’ll come back to the conversation.

STEADYING PHRASE



Give your mind
something
supportive
to return to



TRY THIS

Choose a short phrase that feels believable, such as: “I don’t have to solve everything right now.” Repeat it slowly a few times, silently or aloud.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Repeating a simple phrase gives your attention something steady to return to when your thoughts feel stuck on repeat.

TIP

Choose words you can actually believe. Supportive beats forced positivity.

EMOTION SURFING



Notice the wave.
Let it come & go.



TRY THIS

Notice what you're feeling without trying to push it away straight away. If it feels comfortable, notice whether the intensity, sensations or your thoughts change from moment to moment.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Noticing an emotion with less judgement or resistance may reduce emotional reactivity and give you more choice in how you respond.

TIP

You don't have to make the wave disappear. Notice it, make room for it, and choose what you need next.

PALM PRESS



Give your
attention
something solid
to feel



TRY THIS

Press your thumb comfortably into the palm of your opposite hand for around 10 seconds. Notice the pressure, then release.

Switch hands if you'd like.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Focused pressure gives your attention a clear physical sensation to notice, which may help you reconnect with the present moment.

TIP

Pair the pressure with a simple phrase like "One moment at a time."

BODY SCAN



Notice your body,
one area at a time



TRY THIS

Start at the top of your head and slowly move your attention down towards your toes. Notice sensations like warmth, pressure, tingling or tension, without needing to change them.

WHY IT MAY HELP

A body scan practises noticing physical sensations with curiosity and may help build greater awareness of what's happening in your body.

TIP

Too much to scan your whole body? Choose one small area, like your hands or feet. If focusing inside doesn't feel helpful today, try Orienting instead.

WEIGHTED BLANKET PAUSE



TRY THIS

If you already use a weighted blanket comfortably, place it over your lap or body for a few minutes. Notice whether the pressure feels supportive.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Gentle, evenly distributed pressure can feel comforting or settling for some people.

TIP

Use one you can remove easily yourself and follow the manufacturer's guidance. Remove it if it restricts your breathing or movement.

ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING

A close-up photograph of a woman's face in profile, focusing on her nose. She is using her right hand to pinch her right nostril closed, with her index and middle fingers pressing against it. Her eyes are closed, and her expression is calm. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

A steady breath,
one side at a time



TRY THIS

Close your right nostril and breathe in gently through the left. Switch sides and breathe out through the right. Breathe in through the right, switch, then breathe out through the left.

WHY IT MAY HELP

This traditional yogic breathing practice gives your attention a slow, deliberate rhythm to follow. Some people experience the rhythm as settling.

TIP

Keep your breath comfortable. If either nostril feels blocked or breathing feels restricted, skip this one and return to your natural breath.

SHAKE IT OUT

A person with dark hair in a bun, wearing a brown knit sweater, is shown from the back with their arms raised high. The background is a plain, light grey.

A little movement when you feel wound up



TRY THIS

Gently shake out your hands, then your arms. If it feels good, let the movement spread through your shoulders, legs or whole body. Continue for up to a minute, then pause and notice how you feel.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Brief movement may help shift restlessness or muscle tension and give your attention something physical to focus on.

TIP

If music helps, put on a favourite song and let the movement be loose rather than perfect.

HUMMING



Let sound slow
the exhale



TRY THIS

Breathe in comfortably, then hum a gentle “mmm” as you slowly breathe out. Repeat for a few comfortable breaths.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Humming naturally lengthens the exhale and creates a steady sound to focus on. Some people find the slower rhythm settling.

TIP

Hum softly.
You only need enough sound to comfortably feel and hear it. If the sound or vibration doesn't feel good, skip it or let your exhale stay quiet.

CROSS CRAWL



TRY THIS

March gently in place, touching your right hand to your left knee, then your left hand to your right knee. Continue at a comfortable pace for up to a minute. Sitting works too.

WHY IT MAY HELP

The cross-body pattern gives your attention a clear movement to follow while getting your body moving.

TIP

Getting mixed up?
Slow it down. There's no prize for perfect coordination.

COUNTING BREATH

A steady rhythm for a busy mind



TRY THIS

If counting feels comfortable, breathe in gently for 4 counts and out for 6. Repeat for a few comfortable rounds. Shorten the counts or return to your natural breath whenever you need.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Slow, paced breathing may support a more settled state, while counting gives your attention a simple rhythm to follow.

TIP

Losing count? Use your fingers so your brain doesn't have to keep track.

SLOW EXHALE



Let the breath out
gently



TRY THIS

Breathe in comfortably. Gently purse your lips, as if blowing through a straw, and let your breath out slowly. Repeat for a few comfortable breaths.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Pursed lips naturally slow the exhale, which can help slow your breathing overall. Some people find the gentler rhythm settling.

TIP

Keep the exhale easy, not forced. Longer isn't better if it feels uncomfortable.

JAW RELEASE



Let your jaw
soften



TRY THIS

Notice if your jaw feels tight or your teeth are clenched. Let your teeth separate slightly and allow your jaw to soften. Gently move it side to side if that feels comfortable.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Jaw clenching can happen without you noticing. Pausing to unclench may ease unnecessary muscle tension and bring your attention back to what your body is doing.

TIP

Notice your jaw during everyday moments, especially when concentrating. If you catch yourself clenching, gently soften rather than forcing it open.

ORIENTING



TRY THIS

Slowly look around the space you're in. Let your eyes notice colours, shapes, textures or familiar objects. Move your head gently too, if that feels comfortable.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Looking around brings attention to your current surroundings and gives your brain fresh sensory information about where you are.

TIP

If it helps you stay present, quietly name a few things you can see.

WALL PUSH

Give restless
energy
somewhere to go

A close-up photograph of a person's right hand and forearm pushing against a light-colored wall. The hand is flat against the wall, and the forearm is extended. The person is wearing a light blue wristband and a black watch. The background is a blurred wall and window.

TRY THIS

Stand facing a wall with your hands flat against it. Press firmly but comfortably for around 5–10 seconds while breathing normally.

Release, pause and repeat if it feels helpful.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Pushing against something solid gives your muscles and attention clear physical feedback. Some people find this useful when they feel restless or wound up.

TIP

Keep breathing normally as you push. This isn't a strength test.

SHIFT & NOTICE



Move gently
between
what feels easier
& harder



TRY THIS

Notice an area that feels comfortable or neutral. Then briefly notice a mildly uncomfortable sensation. Gently move your attention between the two, returning to the easier area whenever you need.

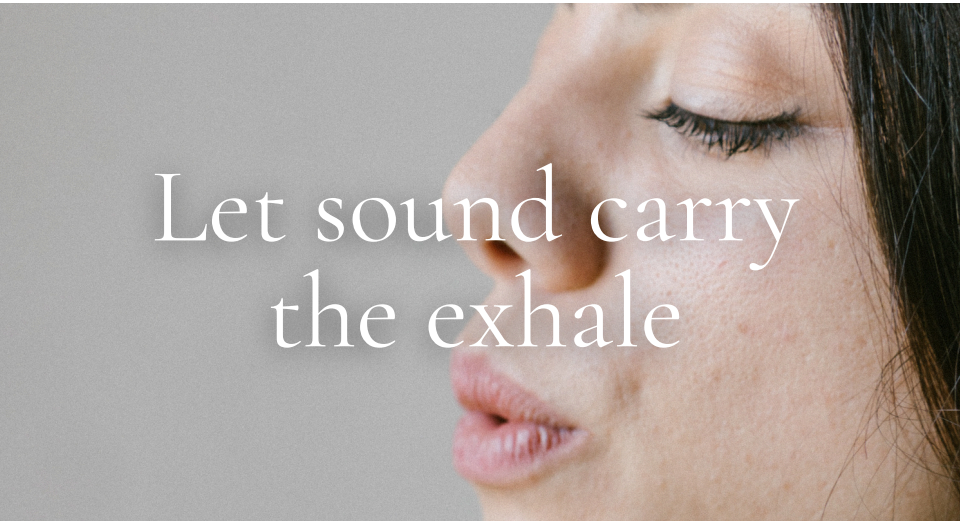
WHY IT MAY HELP

Moving attention between easier and harder sensations may make body awareness feel more manageable, rather than staying focused on discomfort.

TIP

Keep the uncomfortable sensation mild. If it starts to feel like too much, return to something neutral or stop.

VOO EXHALE



Let sound carry the exhale



TRY THIS

Breathe in comfortably. As you breathe out, make a gentle, low “voo” sound. Let the sound continue for as long as the exhale feels easy.

Repeat a few times if you’d like.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Making a long, gentle sound naturally slows the exhale and gives your attention a steady sound and sensation to follow.

TIP

Keep the sound soft and comfortable. If the sound or vibration doesn't feel good, skip it or let your exhale stay quiet.

FEET ON THE FLOOR



Notice what's
beneath you



TRY THIS

Notice where your feet meet the floor. Feel the pressure, temperature or texture beneath them. Slowly wiggle your toes or gently press your feet down.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Feeling the contact beneath your feet gives your attention a clear physical sensation to focus on and may help bring you back to the present moment.

TIP

Shoes or socks are completely fine. Notice whatever sensations you can feel through them.

ALPHABET GAME



Give your mind
something else to
follow



TRY THIS

Choose a category, then work through the alphabet naming one thing for each letter. Animals: aardvark, bear, cat... Skip any letter that gets you stuck.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Searching for words gives your attention a structured task to focus on, which may create a temporary break from repetitive or overwhelming thoughts.

TIP

Make the category silly if you like: pizza toppings, dog names, things you'd never wear.

SCENT ANCHOR



Notice one familiar scent



TRY THIS

Choose a familiar scent you enjoy, such as coffee, hand cream, soap or perfume. Smell it gently and notice what you can detect.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Scent can be a strong sensory cue. Focusing on a familiar smell gives your attention something concrete to notice in the present moment.

TIP

Strong scents not your thing? Skip this one. A grounding tool should work with your senses, not against them.

FIDGET FOCUS



Give restless
hands something
to do



TRY THIS

Choose something comfortable to fiddle with, like a stress ball, putty, textured bracelet or favourite fidget. Let your hands move with it for a minute or two and notice whether it helps.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Repetitive touch or movement gives your hands a simple sensory task. Some people find this helps with restlessness or makes it easier to focus.

TIP

Different textures and movements suit different people. Keep the one your hands naturally reach for.

MOVEMENT BURST



Move in a way
that feels good



TRY THIS

Move for a few minutes in whatever way feels comfortable. Walk, march, dance, stretch or gently move your arms and shoulders.

Stop when you've had enough.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Movement can give restless energy somewhere practical to go and may help shift how you feel after stress.

TIP

Put on a song that matches the kind of movement you need: gentle, upbeat or gloriously loud.

SOUR ANCHOR



A strong taste
to focus on



TRY THIS

Try a sour lolly or a small piece of lemon. Notice the taste and sensations in your mouth for a few moments.

WHY IT MAY HELP

A strong taste gives your attention a clear sensory cue to focus on, which may help bring your attention back to the present moment.

TIP

Too sour isn't better. Choose a flavour that gets your attention without feeling unpleasant.

POSTURE SHIFT

Two women are standing side-by-side against a plain, light-colored background. The woman on the left is wearing a dark green hat, a light blue denim jacket over a dark green top, and dark green pants. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The woman on the right is wearing a wide-brimmed tan hat, a light-colored sweater, and tan pants. She is also smiling and looking towards the camera. Both women are carrying small bags. The text "Notice what changes when you shift your posture" is overlaid in a large, white, serif font across the middle of the image.

Notice what
changes when you
shift your posture



TRY THIS

Change your position slightly in whatever way feels comfortable. You might uncurl a little, lean back, stretch, shift your weight or lift your gaze. Pause and notice whether anything feels different.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Changing your position gives you different physical and sensory information to notice. Sometimes a small shift feels more comfortable or supportive.

TIP

Try it before an appointment or difficult conversation and notice whether the shift feels supportive to you.

PHONE A FRIEND



Reach for someone steady



TRY THIS

Call or text someone you trust. Try: "I'm having a hard moment. Can I talk this through with you?"

WHY IT MAY HELP

Supportive connection can make a hard moment feel a little more manageable.

TIP

If you know what you need, say it. "Can you just listen?" or "Can we talk about something else for a bit?"

MUSCLE RELEASE



Tense. Release.
Notice the
difference.



TRY THIS

Starting at your feet, gently tense one muscle group for about 5 seconds, then let it relax. Notice the difference before slowly moving up your body.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Tensing and relaxing muscles can make the difference between tension and relaxation easier to notice. Some people find the contrast settling.

TIP

Short on time? Choose just your hands, shoulders and jaw. You don't have to do your whole body.

STEADY PLACE



Somewhere that feels a little easier



TRY THIS

Think of, picture or describe a real or imagined place that feels comfortable, steady or supportive. With your eyes open or closed, notice a few details: what might you see, hear or feel there?

WHY IT MAY HELP

Imagining a comforting or supportive place can give your attention something pleasant and predictable to focus on. Some people find this helps them settle.

TIP

Try this first when things feel relatively settled, so the details are easier to remember later.

BUTTERFLY TAPS



A gentle left-right rhythm



TRY THIS

Cross your arms comfortably over your chest and rest your hands on your upper arms or shoulders. Tap slowly from left to right for around 30 seconds.

WHY IT MAY HELP

The alternating taps give your attention a simple, repetitive sensory rhythm. Some people find this comforting or grounding.

TIP

If it feels good, add a slow, gentle rock while you tap.

WRITE IT OUT



Get it out of your
head & onto
the page



TRY THIS

Set a timer for up to 5 minutes and write whatever is circling in your mind. No editing, no making it sound sensible. When the timer ends, stop.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Writing can help organise thoughts and put feelings into words. For some people, that can make what's swirling around feel a little easier to understand.

TIP

If writing starts to feel like too much, stop early. You don't have to reread it. Close the notebook, tear up the page or keep it, whatever feels most useful.

TINY WINS



Notice what went okay



TRY THIS

Name 3 tiny things that went okay today.

WHY IT MAY HELP

When things feel hard, attention can narrow in on what's wrong. Noticing a few small things that went okay can add a little balance to the picture.

TIP

Keep a note called Tiny Wins. Add to it when something comes to mind.

SHOULDER ROLLS

A photograph of a person from the back, with their hair in a bun. Their hands are resting on their shoulders. The text 'Give tense shoulders a little movement' is overlaid in a large, white, serif font.

Give tense
shoulders a little
movement



TRY THIS

Slowly roll your shoulders backwards a few times, then forwards. Keep the movement comfortable. Pause and notice how your shoulders feel.

WHY IT MAY HELP

Stress can sometimes come with increased shoulder muscle tension. Gentle movement may help loosen stiffness and bring your attention to how your shoulders feel.

TIP

Keep the circles small if your shoulders feel stiff. Bigger isn't better.