

Module 3: Nervous System 101

Introduction: Why You're Not Just "Being Sensitive"

Why This Matters

Ever noticed how a small niggle feels huge after a tough week? Or how pain seems to flare after a stressful event, even if you didn't physically do anything "wrong"? That's not in your head. It's your nervous system doing exactly what it's designed to do: respond and protect.

Your nervous system is the command centre for your entire body. It processes physical sensations, emotional stress, memories, past injuries and then makes decisions about how your body should react. Sometimes, it turns the volume up on pain or tension in an effort to keep you safe... even when there's no real threat.

In this module, you'll learn why your body's reactions aren't random or dramatic. They're meaningful messages and once you understand the *why*, you can respond with calm and confidence instead of frustration or fear.

We're not brushing pain aside, we're learning to respond to it with care. It's building awareness and making gentle changes that support your body and nervous system, especially between treatments.

What You'll Learn

- How your nervous system influences pain, tension, energy, and recovery
- Why you might feel "twitchy," flared up, or sensitive even without injury
- The difference between a calm (regulated) vs. stressed (dysregulated) state
- How stress, emotions, trauma or past injuries can shape what you feel today
- What it means to be in "fight, flight, freeze" and how to shift gently out of it
- Simple, everyday tools to help settle your nervous system and reduce reactivity
- Why this understanding makes your massage sessions *more* effective, not less

The Nervous System: Your Body's Communication Highway

Your nervous system is like the body's internal messaging system, constantly scanning, processing, and sending signals. It plays a huge role in how you move, feel, recover, and even how you experience pain.

It's made up of the brain, spinal cord, and a vast network of nerves and it's always working in the background, asking one key question:

“Am I safe, or am I under threat?”

"Let's say you've had a stressful morning, traffic, a deadline, and spilled coffee. Later, your jaw feels tight, and your shoulders are up near your ears. You haven't done anything physical, but your nervous system's been working overtime. That's not 'in your head', that's your body holding the stress."

Your body responds based on the answer, automatically shifting between two key states:

Sympathetic State (Fight, Flight or Freeze)

This is your body's **alert mode**, designed to help you react quickly in stressful or demanding situations. It's useful in short bursts (like avoiding danger or handling a high-pressure moment), but not meant to be your default.

When this state is active:

- Your muscles tense, ready for action
- Breathing becomes faster or shallower
- Heart rate increases
- Digestion slows or pauses
- Pain sensitivity often increases
- Focus narrows survival first, everything else later

You might feel “on edge,” wired but tired, or overwhelmed by little things.

Parasympathetic State (Rest, Repair, and Restore)

This is your **calm state** where your body can rest, digest, recover, and heal. It's essential for long term health and nervous system balance.

When this state is active:

- Breathing slows and deepens
- Heart rate settles
- Muscles soften
- Digestion improves
- Pain tends to ease
- Your system becomes more receptive to care and healing

Why Balance Matters

Both states are normal and we move between them all the time. But if you're stuck in a constantly activated, sympathetic state (often without realising it), your body can start to struggle:

- **Muscle tension** that doesn't ease with stretching
- **Fatigue** that rest doesn't seem to fix
- **Pain flares** without a clear trigger
- **Mood changes** irritability, anxiety, or emotional ups and downs
- **Feeling** "switched on" or unable to fully relax, even when you try

The good news? With awareness and gentle support, your body *can* shift back into a more balanced, restorative state.

That's what this module is here to help with.

Why Stress and Past Experiences Matter

Your body remembers more than your mind does.

Even when a stressful event, injury, or emotionally charged time feels like it's in the past, your nervous system might still be carrying the imprint, quietly shaping how your body reacts today.

This doesn't mean something is wrong with you. It simply means your body has learned patterns to keep you safe and sometimes, it's still responding based on old information.

You might notice:

- **Shoulder tension** creeping in every time your to-do list grows
- **A tight chest** when life feels fast, crowded, or emotionally loaded
- **An old injury site** flaring up during periods of uncertainty or change
- **A heavy or restless feeling** in your body during conflict or overwhelm
- **Posture changes** without realising, like bracing, hunching, or holding your breath

These aren't weaknesses or failures. They're signals your body's way of saying,

"Something feels familiar, and I'm trying to protect you."

But protection doesn't always mean harm is present.

Sometimes, your body just needs **an update** a gentle reminder that you're safe now, that it's okay to soften, to release, to move forward.

The Role of Emotional and Physical Load

Your nervous system doesn't separate physical and emotional stress. Work stress, grief, relationship challenges, burnout they can all affect how your body feels, holds tension, or responds to movement and touch.

Even positive life changes, like a new job, moving house, or becoming a parent can overload your system if there's not enough time for rest and reset.

When your nervous system is already on high alert, it takes **less** to tip things into pain, fatigue, or discomfort.

A small tweak or minor movement might feel bigger than it "should," simply because your body is running on reserve power.

The Good News?

You're not stuck with these patterns. With awareness, small tools, and nervous system support, your body can relearn safety and flexibility.

It doesn't happen overnight but it's absolutely possible.

This course will guide you through gentle practices to help reassure your nervous system, reduce reactive patterns, and build more ease into your everyday life.

Mixed Signals: When the Body Feels "Off" Without Clear Cause

Have you ever woken up sore, stiff, or just *off*, without doing anything to explain it? No big workout. No awkward sleeping position. No clear reason.

That disconnect can be confusing, and even a bit worrying.

But here's the thing: **your body doesn't only respond to physical load.**

It responds to your **whole environment**, mental, emotional, and sensory too.

Even if your body feels like it's reacting "out of the blue," there's often a reason. It just might not be one you can see or easily measure.

What Can Trigger These "Off" Days?

These body shifts are often linked to your nervous system being **overloaded or under resourced**, not actual injury or strain. Common contributors include:

- **Mental load or decision fatigue** (yes, thinking hard takes energy!)
- **Poor or fragmented sleep**
- **Too much screen time or sensory input**
- **Ongoing stress, even low level or background worry**
- **Lack of varied movement or time outdoors**

- **Big emotional moments, even happy ones** (your system still has to process them)

Your nervous system picks up on all of this and might respond with changes in **tension, balance, energy, or coordination**.

How This Might Feel

When your nervous system is on edge or worn down, you might notice:

- Muscles feel **tight or jumpy** even at rest
- Movements feel **clumsy**, off balance, or less coordinated
- Old aches or tension spots **flare up temporarily**
- You feel **tender to touch**, emotionally sensitive, or easily overwhelmed
- The self-care tools that normally help don't work as well (or not at all)

These are **not signs of failure**, weakness, or imagined pain.

They're signs that your system might be asking for **calm, space, and care** not more effort.

What You Can Do Instead of Pushing Through

Instead of trying to "stretch it out" or push harder on tough days, try:

- **Downshifting gently** — slow walks, quiet time, calming music
- **Returning to basics** — rest, water, breath, connection
- **Switching tools** — if heat isn't helping, maybe try gentle movement instead
- **Doing less, with intention** — your system might need a pause, not a push

You're Not Imagining It

Your body's responses are real, even if the cause isn't obvious.

And they're worth listening to.

When you understand how mixed signals show up, you can meet them with curiosity instead of confusion... and care instead of criticism.

Tool 4: "The Ground + Breathe Reset"

A 2-minute nervous system support practice

This calming reset helps shift your body out of "fight or flight" and into a more supported, balanced state even if just for a moment.

You can do it seated, standing, or lying down.

Step 1: Feel Your Base (30 seconds)

Bring your attention to where your body meets the ground. Your feet, your seat, your back against a chair or floor. Notice the contact. Let yourself settle a little heavier into the surface beneath you.

“I am being held. I don’t have to hold everything.”

Step 2: Soften Your Exhale (30 seconds)

Take a slow breath in through your nose.

Now exhale gently through your mouth, as if sighing or blowing out a candle. Let your exhale be longer than your inhale.

Repeat 3 times.

Long exhales help your nervous system feel safe enough to soften.

Step 3: Orient to Safety (30 seconds)

Look around your space.

Name 3 things you see.

Notice anything that brings ease, a plant, a soft light, a colour you like.

Let your eyes land softly. Breathe there for a moment.

This simple scan helps remind your brain: “Right now, I’m okay.”

Step 4: Gentle Re-Entry (30 seconds)

Wiggle your fingers and toes.

Roll your shoulders once.

Bring your awareness back to your body.

Check in: “What feels even 5% calmer?”

This is giving your nervous system a moment to reset.

What's Next

Now that you’ve started to understand the role your nervous system plays in tension, sensitivity, and overwhelm, you’re better equipped to respond, not just react.

In the next module, we’ll shift focus to something powerful: **trust**.

You’ll explore how to rebuild confidence in your body, especially after periods of discomfort, doubt, or fear. You don’t need to get everything perfect, the focus is on staying connected and learning what feels truly supportive for you.

You’ll learn:

- How fear of movement shows up (and what to do instead)
- Why repetition helps your nervous system feel safe
- Ways to begin building trust without pressure or overthinking

This next part is all about **reconnection**. You don't need to have it all figured out, just bring your curiosity. We'll meet you there.