



# **Not Everything, Not Today**

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A 4-Week Nervous System  
Regulation Workbook for Women  
Who Are Always On

**Not Everything, Not Today.** A 4-Week Nervous System Regulation Workbook for Women Who Are Always On

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**Important:** This book offers general information about stress, recovery, and everyday life. It is not a substitute for medical or mental health advice, diagnosis, or treatment. If you have symptoms, talk to a doctor or a licensed mental health professional. In an emergency, call 911. The author and publisher accept no liability for any harm resulting from the use of this content.

**Characters:** Jenna, Bridget, Selin, and everyone else in the everyday scenes are fictional. Any resemblance to real people is coincidental.

**How this book was made:** Research, writing, translation, and review were done with the help of AI tools (Claude, Codex, Gemini). The illustrations were created with AI (Gemini) and checked for errors. Claims about effects were checked against the cited sources (as of October 2026). The book has not been reviewed by a physician or a therapist.

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# When It's All Too Much

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*This page is right up front. That way, you can find it fast. These contacts are for the United States.*

## **First: Is this an emergency?**

Call **911** right away if you or someone with you

- has new or severe chest pain,
- has severe trouble breathing,
- faints or is unresponsive,
- is in immediate danger of self-harm.

If there are signs of an emergency, call 911 first. Don't try exercises or wait for a crisis counselor. This also applies if symptoms start during an exercise.

Some problems aren't life-threatening but can't wait until your doctor's office opens. Call your doctor's after-hours line or a nurse advice line. Your insurance card often lists a nurse line on the back. Urgent care is another option.

If you need someone to talk to: Contact the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**. Call or text **988**, or chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org). It's free, confidential, and available 24/7. If you can't get through right away, try again or use another contact option.

If a partner threatens, controls, or hurts you, contact the **National Domestic Violence Hotline**. Call **1-800-799-7233**, text **START** to **88788**, or chat at [thehotline.org](https://thehotline.org). Support is free, confidential, and

available 24/7. **Device safety:** Calls, texts, and internet use can be monitored. Use a safer device if you can. Private browsing won't erase every trace. In immediate danger, call **911** first.

## When it isn't an emergency, but it's still too much

Pick **one** thing. You don't have to do them all. Any order is fine.

- **Look around.** Let your eyes move slowly around the room. Quietly name five things you see. The lamp. The spot on the wall. Yesterday's mug.
- **Feel your feet.** Press them into the floor for a few seconds, then release. Use only as much pressure as feels comfortable.
- **Breathe out a little longer than you breathe in.** No counting, no effort. If that doesn't feel good, keep breathing normally. That works, too.
- **Give your senses something different.** Open a window. Run water over your hands at a comfortable temperature. Go into another room.
- **Step away from the situation** if you can. "I'll call you back in 10 minutes" is a complete sentence.
- **Call someone** you don't have to hold it together for.

**Stop** any of these exercises if you feel dizzy, breathing gets harder, something hurts, or anxiety increases. Breathe normally, open your eyes, and do something with your hands.

This page can't replace a doctor or therapy. It's here for those 10 minutes when you'd otherwise have nothing.

*Printable version: [callidus-am.de/not-everything-today](http://callidus-am.de/not-everything-today) (a wallet-size card for when it's all too much)*

# How to Use This Book

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**About 10 minutes a day.** A few to read, about 5 to try something, 1 to jot it down. Trying it in real life comes later: at dinner, in the car, in a meeting. That time doesn't count toward the 10 minutes.

**Four weeks, eight tools.** You'll meet two each week. You don't have to like them all. By the end, you'll know which ones help *you* and which don't. Both count as results. If none helps, that's useful information, too. It's time for more support. The end of the book explains where to find it.

**Every test run has three versions:** 1 minute, a standard version of about 5 minutes, and a longer option. That last one is for days when you feel like it. The minute counts in full.

**Keep going without catching up.** Missed three days? Continue with the day you're on. Nobody's checking. The four-week schedule gives you a framework. You haven't signed a contract.

**The Pizza Rule:** If you can't manage it today, take the day off. Order a pizza, leave the book closed, and try again tomorrow. Skipping a day is built into the program. You haven't failed.

**Gaps in the logbook are allowed.** A blank week means you didn't write anything down. Maybe it was busy. Maybe you felt good. Maybe both.

**Write in the book.** That's what it's for. Prefer loose pages at the kitchen table? All the forms are free to print, with no sign-up: [callidus-am.de/not-everything-today](http://callidus-am.de/not-everything-today).

**The people in this book are fictional.** Jenna, Bridget, and Selin don't exist. Their Tuesday evenings probably do.

# Still On

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## Sunday, 9:52 p.m.

**Jenna** is on the couch. On TV, *Farmer Wants a Wife* is on. One contestant just said she's "great with animals." Jenna watches and thinks about the gym bag. Where is the gym bag? Does Max have PE tomorrow or swimming? Did she send David Krawczyk the slides? The contestant pets a calf. Jenna has missed the last 10 minutes.

**Bridget** sits in the car outside the house. The engine is off. Her evening shift is over. The radio is still going. The song is heavy on guitars. The singer sounds like he's had a long shift, too. A light is on upstairs. Her husband Dan is probably asleep already. Bridget stays put. One more song.

**Selin** lies in bed, looking at her wrist. Sleep readiness: 61 out of 100. "Your body shows signs of stress. How about a breathing break?" Selin wishes her body would be more discreet. She opens the breathing app. Then her email. Just for a second.

All three are worn out. The day is over. Work is finished. The kids are in bed or have moved out. And all three are still on.



## What "still on" means

The day ended a while ago. Your mind hasn't caught up. Your shoulders are somewhere near your ears. Your jaw is working, even though you're not eating. You're tired, but you aren't sleepy. In your head, you're still in the 2 p.m. meeting.

Often, your stress system is behind this. It's doing exactly what it was built to do. Something important happens, and your body shifts into high gear. Your heart beats faster. Your muscles tighten. Your attention narrows and sharpens. Hormones such as adrenaline and

cortisol make energy available. Very handy when a child runs into the street. Or when it's 7:40 a.m. and three lunches still need packing. Once it's over, your body settles back down. That's the plan, anyway.

These sensations can have other causes, too. If they're new or severe, have a doctor check them out.

Think of it as a gas pedal and a brake. That's a simplified picture. The gas pedal is your sympathetic nervous system. The brake is your parasympathetic nervous system. Both actually work together all the time. Their coordination is much finer than anything in a car. The picture still helps.

Things get harder when your body can barely ease off the gas. After the meeting comes the 4th grade parents group text. Then your mother's call. Then the question of tomorrow's dinner. Stress researcher Bruce McEwen described how ongoing strain can wear on the body over time.<sup>1</sup> Stress itself isn't an enemy. But recovery is a necessity.

### **The smoke detector**

A smoke detector that goes off over toast is annoying. One that stays silent during a fire is a disaster. Smoke detectors tend to err on the side of caution.

Why do our protective responses so often kick in "too soon"? Evolutionary medicine researcher Randolph Nesse uses this image to explain it. A false alarm costs little. Missing a real one could cost everything.<sup>2</sup> If an email from David Krawczyk feels like a saber-toothed tiger in the hall, this model offers an explanation. Your body's response may be overly cautious.

Sometimes, though, there's an actual fire. Too much work. Too little help. Too many people who need "just a quick thing." Adjusting the smoke detector won't do much then. Someone needs to turn off the

stove.

### **What this book can and can't do**

Over four weeks, you'll try eight tools and see what happens. A few might help. One might annoy you. None might fit. This book can't cure you or change your job. It can't make your mother hang up. It won't turn you into a new person in 28 days. Anyone promising that usually has something else to sell you.

**You can learn ways to settle down. Some pressures also call for different conditions, shared responsibilities, or help.**

That's why Week 3 focuses on crossing things off and handing them off. It's also where the title comes from.

Where possible, the tools draw on research. You'll find the sources in the footnotes. This program as a whole hasn't been tested in a study. If a tool helps you, that's a real experience. It doesn't prove it will help anyone else. Each time you try a tool, we call it a test run. You can be curious without needing a particular result.

And the vagus nerve? It's had quite a career lately. Supposedly, it relieves stress, reduces inflammation, and helps with weight loss. Apparently, you can also train it by gargling. Time for the first Myth Lab.

MYTH LAB 1

“Strengthen Your Vagus Nerve!”

**Wellness Bingo.** Check off anything you’ve come across in the past four weeks:

|                   |                                      |                        |                           |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Vagus reset       | Cortisol detox                       | Release blocked energy | Nervous system hack       |
| Calm in 5 minutes | Cold plunge                          | Healing frequencies    | Your body keeps the score |
| Hum away anxiety  | The one trick doctors won't tell you | Polyvagal              | Holistic                  |
| Dopamine fast     | Gargling                             | Manifesting            | Ear massage               |

Four in a row? Welcome to the internet.

**The promise.** Your vagus nerve is supposedly “weak” or “blocked.” The right exercises can strengthen it. That will supposedly fix stress, anxiety, digestive problems, and trouble sleeping.

**What was actually studied.** The vagus nerve is the tenth cranial nerve, one of the nerves connected directly to the brain. It runs from the brainstem through the neck into the chest and abdomen. Its name comes from *vagus*, Latin for “wandering.” It helps regulate your heartbeat, breathing, and digestion. Signals travel both ways: from brain to organs and from organs back to brain.<sup>3</sup> It’s part of the “brake.” It isn’t a switch or a muscle.

Researchers can only estimate its influence on the heart indirectly. Heart rate variability describes how much the time between heartbeats changes. Researchers use certain measures of this variation under carefully defined conditions.<sup>4</sup> More on that in Myth Lab 6. Slow breathing can change those measures briefly.<sup>5</sup>

Doctors use devices to stimulate the vagus nerve electrically for certain conditions.<sup>6</sup> An exercise at your kitchen table is a very different matter. More on that in Myth Lab 5.

And the big promise? There's no solid evidence that exercises permanently "strengthen" a "weak vagus nerve." Even the wording is unclear. What exactly is supposed to get stronger?

**What about polyvagal theory?** Many books and courses on this subject rely on it. Neuroscientist Stephen Porges proposed it in 1994. Among other things, the theory describes three states. It links them to different parts of the nervous system:

- **Safety and connection:** a "ventral" branch of the vagus nerve
- **Fight or flight:** the sympathetic nervous system
- **Freeze:** a "dorsal" branch of the vagus nerve

The model is easy to picture and popular in therapy and coaching. It's disputed in physiology and neuroanatomy. Critics include psychophysiological Paul Grossman. They argue that key claims about anatomy and evolution don't hold up.<sup>78</sup> Porges and his supporters disagree and have defended the theory.<sup>9</sup> In 2026, 39 specialists jointly laid out their objections again. Porges again disagreed. Key physiological claims of the theory remain strongly disputed.

If the picture of three states helps you make sense of your day, use it. Just be wary of paying for treatment that presents the theory as established biology.

**Safety.** Even simple breathing and movement exercises can feel unpleasant. That’s why each exercise tells you when to stop. Be cautious about approaches involving devices, cold, or breath-holding.

**What this means for you.** You can skip the vagus training. Try what helps you settle down: breathing pace, movement, sleep, less on your plate. Wherever the vagus nerve plays a part, it does so without a subscription.

|                                           |                                       |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Verdict: “strengthening the vagus”</b> | not supported                         |
| <b>Verdict: polyvagal theory</b>          | unclear, key claims strongly disputed |
| <b>Safety</b>                             | with caveats (follow the stop rules)  |



## Before you begin

The tools in this book are deliberately simple. Even so, some won’t suit you. You can stop any exercise at any time.

**Breathing exercises.** If you have a heart or lung condition or tend to get dizzy, talk with your doctor first. Stop any breathing exercise if you get dizzy, breathing gets harder, or you feel anxious. Go back to breathing normally. Each exercise offers an alternative without a breathing focus.

**Movement.** Every Movement Break can also be done seated. Skip anything that hurts. Pain doesn’t mean progress here.

**Body awareness.** Paying close attention to your body can feel unpleasant. This can happen after distressing experiences, for example. You can keep your eyes open during every exercise. Keep your attention on the room around you, and stop whenever you want.

**When to talk with a professional first.** Talk with someone if you have panic attacks, flashbacks, or often feel detached from yourself. Seek help if you've felt low for weeks, are barely sleeping, or can barely get through the day. You can use this book alongside professional support. You deserve more help than a book can give. A primary care doctor, counseling center, or licensed mental health professional can be a good starting point. Asking for help doesn't mean you've failed. Bridget would say: That's what we're here for.

# Your Starting Point

Answer these three questions about the **past 7 days**. There are no right answers. This isn't a diagnosis. It's a snapshot of where you're starting. In four weeks, you can compare.

**1. How much has tension interfered with your daily life?** 0 = not at all · 5 = moderately · 10 = very much

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10

**2. When something upset you, how hard was it to settle down again?** 0 = not hard at all · 5 = moderately hard · 10 = very hard

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10

**3. What situation would you like to experience differently?**  
(One sentence is enough. For example: “Coming home at night and immediately being back on duty.”)

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_