SVEAS ALCHEMY

ACTIVATE YOUR INNER RECOVERY

A Complete, In-Depth Course Workbook for Somatic Healing, Nervous System Regulation & Lasting Balance

Science & Physiology | Somatic Practice | Cognitive Tools | 90-Day Healing Programme

Welcome to Your Healing Journey

This workbook is designed to give you both the theoretical understanding and the practical tools needed to break long-standing stress patterns and restore balance in your body and mind. Recovery is not a passive absence of activity - it is an active physiological and somatic process. By integrating neurobiology, somatic practice and cognitive restructuring, we create the conditions for deep and lasting healing.

Part 1: Scientific & Theoretical Framework

1.1 Nervous System Physiology & Prolonged Stress

The autonomic nervous system (ANS) controls the functions that happen automatically in the body: heartbeat, digestion, breathing and hormone secretion. The ANS is divided into two main branches:

• **Sympathetic nervous system (SNS):** The body's "accelerator". It is activated by perceived threats and demands, leading to the release of adrenaline and noradrenaline. Heart rate increases, blood pressure rises and blood is redirected to large muscle groups.

• **Parasympathetic nervous system (PNS):** The body's "brake". It is responsible for rest, recovery, digestion and cellular repair ("rest and digest").

The HPA axis (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis): Prolonged stress activates the HPA axis, leading to continuous cortisol secretion. Sustained activation creates a neuroendocrine imbalance: immune activity is downregulated, digestion deteriorates, sleep architecture is disrupted and the brain's memory centre (the hippocampus) is negatively affected, while its fear centre (the amygdala) becomes oversensitive.

1.2 Polyvagal Theory (Dr Stephen Porges)

Polyvagal theory describes how the vagus nerve (the tenth cranial nerve) regulates our physiological states through neuroception - the brain's unconscious assessment of safety or danger in our surroundings and body. The system is organised into three evolutionary levels:

State	Neural pathways	Physiological experience	Feeling / behaviour
Ventral vagal	Myelinated vagus (ventral aspect)	Calm heart rate, good digestion, relaxed facial muscles.	Safety, social engagement, presence, connection, curiosity.
Sympathetic activation	Spinal nerves and sympathetic chain	High heart rate, rapid breathing, tense muscles, superficial attention.	Fight or flight, anxiety, irritation, worry, restlessness.
Dorsal vagal	Unmyelinated vagus (dorsal aspect)	Low heart rate, inhibited digestion, drained energy, heavy body.	Freeze / shutdown, numbness, hopelessness, exhaustion.

1.3 Cognitive Mechanisms & Thinking Traps

The brain is a protective organ that prioritises survival over well-being. During chronic stress, habitual thought patterns (cognitive distortions) send continuous false threat signals to the amygdala, maintaining the physiological stress response.

• **Catastrophising:** Automatically assuming the worst possible outcome.

• **All-or-nothing thinking:** Seeing situations in black and white, without nuance.

• **"Must" and "should" demands:** Internal expectations that create constant guilt and performance-related stress.

• **Body monitoring:** Misinterpreting natural bodily signals as signs of serious illness or breakdown.

Part 2: Exercises & Somatic Practice

Exercise 2.1: Guided Somatic Body Scan (15 minutes)

Purpose: To shift from cognitive analysis to direct sensation and develop interoception - the ability to notice the body's internal state without judgement.

• Lie down comfortably with support under your knees. Place one hand on your chest and one on your abdomen.

• Bring your attention to the soles of your feet. Notice temperature, tingling or heaviness. Avoid changing anything - simply observe.

• Move slowly upwards through your calves, knees, thighs, pelvis, abdomen, chest, shoulders, jaw and forehead.

• When you notice tension, breathe into that area and silently think "Allow" as you breathe out.

Exercise 2.2: Vagus-Stimulating Exercises (Vagal Tone Activation)

A. Eye and neck exercise (Basic Exercise): Interlace your fingers behind your head. Keep your head facing forwards. Move only your eyes as far to the right as you can without turning your head. Hold for 30-60 seconds until you notice an involuntary sigh, swallow or yawn. Repeat on the left. This relaxes the suboccipital muscles and stimulates the vagus nerve.

B. Sound and vibration (humming and gargling): The vagus nerve passes the vocal cords and throat. Humming at a low frequency, such as "OM" or "Mmm", for 3-5 minutes creates vibrations that stimulate parasympathetic activation. Gargle with clean water for 60 seconds as part of your morning routine.

Exercise 2.3: Cognitive Toolkit - CBT & the RAIN Model

The RAIN model for emotional regulation:

• **R - Recognise:** Acknowledge the feeling or thought present right now. For example: "I feel a strong knot of worry in my chest."

• **A - Allow:** Let the feeling be there without trying to change it, suppress it or escape it. Silently say: "It is okay to feel this way right now."

• **I - Investigate:** Explore with curiosity and compassion. Where do you feel it in your body? What thoughts are connected to it?

• **N - Nurture:** Offer yourself compassion. Place a hand over your heart and offer the comforting words you would give a close friend.

Exercise 2.4: Yin Yoga for the Nervous System

Hold the positions for 3-5 minutes, using cushions or blankets for passive support. Focus on long, gentle exhalations: breathe in for 4 seconds and out for 6-8 seconds.

Butterfly Pose (Baddha Konasana)

Opens the hips and releases tension in the lower back and gluteal muscles.

Legs-Up-the-Wall Pose (Viparita Karani)

An inversion that lowers blood pressure and shifts the body towards a parasympathetic state.

Child's Pose (Balasana)

Offers a sense of safety and retreat, and calms the mind.

Practice notes

Part 3: Workbook, Reflection & Journals

3.1 Mapping Your Personal Stress & Nervous System Signals

Complete the fields below to increase self-awareness and recognise your early warning signs:

My physical signs of sympathetic activation (fight / flight):
(For example: tense jaw, shallow breathing, palpitations, stomach cramps.)

My physical signs of a dorsal vagal state (freeze / shutdown):
(For example: extreme mental fatigue, emptiness, withdrawal, heavy limbs.)

My main stress triggers - people, environments and situations:

3.2 Seven-Day Recovery Programme (Intensive Challenge)

Day	Focus	Goal & activity
1	Blood sugar stability	Eat a protein-rich breakfast within 60 minutes of waking. Avoid coffee on an empty stomach.
2	Screen and sensory reset	No screens for the first 30 minutes of the morning or the final 90 minutes before sleep.
3	Microbreaks	Include three 3-minute sessions of mindful box breathing during your working day.
4	Vagus activation	Do the eye exercise and hum for 3 minutes in the evening.
5	Somatic movement	20 minutes of gentle Yin Yoga or a slow nature walk without headphones.
6	Setting boundaries	Say no to at least one thing that drains your energy this week.
7	Active rest	Review the past year and spend 1 hour in complete passive rest (body scanning).

3.3 Daily Gratitude & Evening Journal

Daily check-in - Date: _____

1. What did my body feel today, and which nervous system state was most present?

2. Three things or moments I am truly grateful for today:

3. How did I offer myself recovery and safety today?

4. What can I let go of instead of carrying it into tomorrow?

3.4 90-Day Action Plan & Personal Emergency Plan

My Personal Plan for Acute Stress, Panic or Shutdown

1. Grounding: Place both feet on the floor, look around, and name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch and 3 things you can hear.

2. Breathing: Lengthen the exhalation: breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 2 seconds and breathe out for 7 seconds.

3. Self-touch: Place your right hand under your left armpit and your left hand on your right shoulder. Give yourself a hug to mark the boundaries of your body.

4. My trusted contact person: _____