

Somatic Work

Somatics: A broad term, somatics focuses on body movement as a means to improve mental health. Somatic therapy relies on the mind-body connection for treatment, and is beneficial in reducing stress caused by anxiety, depression, trauma, relationship issues and other mental ailments. To regulate our nervous system distress somatic work shrinks the amygdala by increase oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin, hence helps lessen depression.



The Nervous System

The autonomic nervous system - which as the name suggests is involved in a number of typically automatic, regulatory functions - is then further split up into the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS).

Sympathetic nervous system **up regulation**: SNS activates in the body to help prepare for a perceived threat, and includes: inhibition of the digestive and immune systems, increases in pupil size and heart rate, and expansion of the lungs. These processes are meant to optimize functions in the body when it's under attack.

Parasympathetic nervous system **down regulation**: PNS alters a number of functions in the body to help it recover. These functions are largely mirror opposites of SNS activation, and include: stimulation of the digestive and immune systems, decreases in pupil size and heart rate, and contraction of the lungs. These processes optimize functions in the body at rest, and allow it to focus on maintenance.

Neuroplasticity

Neuroplasticity, simply, refers to the brain's ability to change and form new connections. It means the brain is always learning. The brain is neutral - it doesn't know the difference between good and bad. It learns whatever is repeated - both helpful and unhelpful thoughts, actions and habits

There are two main types of neuroplasticity:

- **Functional plasticity** is the brain's ability to move functions from a damaged area of the brain to other undamaged areas.
- **Structural plasticity** is the brain's ability to actually change its physical structure as a result of learning.

Neuroplasticity can be changed to more helpful thoughts and actions by using somatic practices. It is scientifically proven that to reframe any distress in the brain by talk therapy or cognitive reframing it can take up to 200–300 times, and it can take up to 80 times to reprogram one negative thought. But if done with somatic movement that feels good it can take 10–20 times.

Somatic Practices

- Baseline reading 1-10 (how relaxed or stressed you are feeling zero is neutral 10 is high stress)
 - Close or open eyes
 - Just noticing, no judgment, just awareness of information
 - Start to orient in the room or space, looking around the space taking in what you see, hear, smell, touch, and taste
 - What signals is your body giving you as you take in your surroundings
 - Shaking, or cupping the body might need to up-regulate before down-regulation
 - Notice the clothes touching you, the temperature in the room
 - Notice more or less sensations anywhere in the body
 - Orienting take in the room, is there a fight-flight or tunnel vision response happening (up-regulation or down-regulation)
 - Butterfly pressing, apply pressure with fingers right above the collar bone, rotating right and left fingers for about a minute.
 - Arm sweeps, run your hands down your arms one at a time, maybe even squeeze the arm as you move the hand down
 - Settling breath, inhale for the count of two exhale for the count of four to six and repeat, sympathetic connects to the inhale and the parasympathetic connects to the exhale,
 - Knee or thigh taps
 - Trauma Sensitive Yoga
 - The self hug, put one hand under your armpit and the other arm across that hand to the opposite shoulder
 - Slip hands under armpits (if useful add pressure with the thumbs rotating right to left)
 - Strong energetic boundaries know where your energy beings and where others ends
 - One hand on forehead other hand on back of neck
 - One hand on chest the other hand on stomach/belly
 - Pleasure activation, notice where you feel good, okay, comfortable, or pleasure in your body. Notice what sensations contribute to you feeling pleasure/good in your body (the temperature in the room, your breath, your thoughts, etc)
 - Laughter the body and vocal activation might need to release through laughter
 - Take baseline again
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Trauma Sensitive Yoga

1. Interpersonal Relationship: with the mind and the body. We want to know the body has functions. Being aware of what the body is experiencing is what we look for to nurture.
2. Power of Choice: having the ability to make a choice or not make a choice based off of your awareness. Making a choice when you could not.
3. Self Advocating: affective action for what the body is experiencing and the brain is aware of in the moment. There will be choice making with options to do what is right for your body even if that is not moving.

