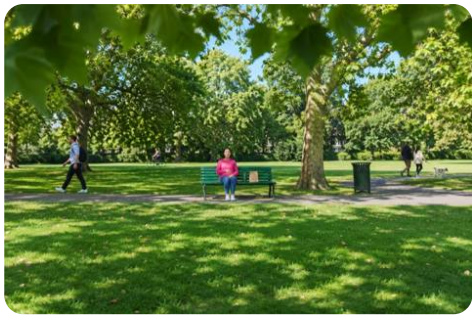
NEWS LESSON

Can You Really Reset Your Nervous System in Five Minutes?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Do you think stress is always bad for us? Why or why not?
2. Which wellness trends have you noticed online, and which of them seem sensible to you?
3. How quickly can you usually calm down after something stressful?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**dependable**	☐	A	to do too much exercise without enough rest
2	**inflammation**	☐	B	again and again, without stopping
3	**contributing**	☐	C	important enough to make a real difference
4	**overtrain**	☐	D	not working in a balanced way
5	**persistently**	☐	E	a sore, swollen, red area in the body
6	**dysregulated**	☐	F	popular at a particular time
7	**meaningful**	☐	G	able to be trusted to work well
8	**fashionable**	☐	H	helping to cause something

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Experts say there is no such thing as a nervous system reset, but a few minutes of slow breathing and some ordinary habits can help your body recover from stress.

1 Scroll through social media and you will find an industry built around one promise: that you can "reset" your nervous system. The suggestions range from tapping the side of your hand and humming to cold plunges, vibrating plates and spiky acupressure mats. Stress is out of date, apparently; the fashionable word is "dysregulated". In a feature published on 2 October 2026, The Guardian asked doctors and other experts whether any of this holds up.

2 Every expert agreed that there is no such thing as resetting the nervous system, and that nobody would want to. The nervous system is the control network linking the brain, spinal cord and nerves. Its autonomic branch handles automatic jobs such as heart rate, blood pressure and digestion, and it has two main parts. The sympathetic system produces the "fight or flight" response, while the parasympathetic system, known as "rest and digest", slows the heart and supports recovery.

3 Stress activates the first, whether the cause is an urgent email or a family bereavement: the heart speeds up, muscles tense and we become more alert. That response is useful, because we need it to exercise, concentrate and meet deadlines. The trouble begins when we struggle to wind down once the demand has gone, leaving us feeling "wired and tired" and, according to the experts, potentially contributing to inflammation and heart and metabolic problems. A healthy system, then, is not permanently calm. It is flexible.

4 The most dependable ways of building that flexibility are rather dull. Slow breathing has been shown to raise heart rate variability, the changing gap between heartbeats, which researchers often use as a window on the parasympathetic system. Dr Serena Lai, a London psychiatrist, points to research suggesting that around six slow breaths a minute is among the most effective ways of causing a short-term change, and she recommends breathing in for about five seconds and out for five, for five to ten minutes. In a separate month-long trial, five minutes a day of "cyclic sighing" improved mood.

5 Other habits come with evidence too. Regular aerobic exercise can improve how the system regulates itself in the long run, although athletes who overtrain show lower heart rate variability, so recovery matters. Consistent sleep and wake times, breaks from screens and time outdoors also help. Cold water is less clear. The body's first reaction to a cold plunge is a stress response, with calm following afterwards, and one neurosurgeon says there is not yet enough credible evidence of meaningful benefits for the nervous system. If you enjoy it and feel calmer, he adds, that is reason enough. Acupressure mats and consumer vagus nerve devices have thinner evidence.

6 So no, five minutes cannot reset anything, and no single trick is a magic bullet. But a few minutes of slow breathing can shift some short-term measurements, and ordinary habits help the body bounce back from stress. Anyone who feels persistently anxious or exhausted should talk to a doctor, because no breathing exercise replaces that.

Sources: The Guardian, Feeling wired? The truth about 'nervous system resets'; Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews, Effects of voluntary slow breathing on heart rate and heart rate variability: A systematic review and a meta-analysis. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Every expert agreed that the nervous system cannot be reset. (T) (F) (NG)
2. The experts say the stress response is always harmful. (T) (F) (NG)
3. The text suggests that more exercise is always better for the nervous system. (T) (F) (NG)
4. The neurosurgeon says cold water has clear and proven benefits. (T) (F) (NG)
5. The text says how many people took part in the cyclic sighing trial. (T) (F) (NG)

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

consistent **dull** **exhausted** **industry** **profitable** **range** **remarkable** **tense**

1. The wellness _____ sells many products that promise quick results.
2. Early nights and regular meals may sound _____, but they help more than most gadgets.
3. She slept for twelve hours because she was so _____ after the marathon.
4. A _____ bedtime matters more than one long lie-in at the weekend.
5. The shop sells a wide _____ of products, from herbal teas to sleep masks.
6. Your muscles _____ when you feel threatened.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time the meeting ended, Sam _____ at his desk for nine hours. (BE)
2. The feature _____ on 2 October 2026. (PUBLISH)
3. Over the last few years, slow breathing _____ to raise heart rate variability. (SHOW)
4. If she _____ more, she would feel less wired. (SLEEP)
5. If you enjoy it and feel calmer, he _____, that is reason enough. (ADD)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many verbs and adjectives need one particular preposition. Check the pair in a dictionary and learn it as one chunk.

about	at	from	of	on	to	with

1. Researchers often rely _____ heart rate variability as a measure of calm.
2. Regular exercise can contribute _____ better recovery over time.
3. Many people benefit _____ a short walk after lunch.
4. Some influencers are accused _____ exaggerating the effects of simple tricks.
5. It is hard to cope _____ stress without a break.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Why do ideas like "resetting" yourself appeal to so many people?
2. Would you pay for a gadget or a mat that promises to calm you? What would persuade you?
3. Which of the ordinary habits in the text do you already do, and which would you find hardest?

9 Role-play: is the mat worth it?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the flatmate who wants to buy

You saw a video about a spiky mat that promises to calm you down. It costs a lot. Explain why you want it and try to persuade your flatmate to share the cost.

Student B · the flatmate who is unsure

You are not sure the mat is worth the money. Ask about the evidence, suggest a cheaper idea and try to agree on a plan you are both happy with.

Useful phrases

I saw a video that says it works in five minutes.
That's a lot of money for a mat.
What's the evidence?
I'd rather try something free first.
Let's wait a week and then decide.
I'm not convinced, but I'm happy to try.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you buy the mat, and why?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 G · 2 E · 3 H · 4 A · 5 B · 6 D · 7 C · 8 F

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 F · 4 F · 5 NG

5 Vocabulary

1 industry · 2 dull · 3 exhausted · 4 consistent · 5 range · 6 tense

6 Verb forms

1 had been · 2 was published · 3 has been shown · 4 slept · 5 adds

7 Language focus

1 on · 2 to · 3 from · 4 of · 5 with

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