

When Your Body Is Overwhelmed, Change Gets Harder

You may have a grocery list, a plan for breakfast, a practitioner's recommendations, a shelf of supplements, and a sincere desire to feel different.

And still, at the end of a long day, the meal you planned feels impossible. Being in the kitchen is too much. You can't decide what sounds tolerable, so you don't eat until you are suddenly ravenous, or you eat whatever requires the least from you.

That does not mean you are lazy, undisciplined, or incapable of change.

It may mean your body is overwhelmed.

The nervous system is not separate from health behavior. It is part of the context in which every health behavior happens. It helps regulate automatic processes such as heart rate, breathing, digestion, and the body's responses to stress (Waxenbaum et al., 2025). When life feels demanding, uncertain, painful, overstimulating, or simply too full, it becomes harder to access the spaciousness required to plan, choose, prepare, and start cooking.

A body under strain is not a body that needs more pressure.

It is easy to treat food choices as isolated decisions. Did you make the "good" choice or the "bad" one? Did you follow through or fall off?

But our choices do not appear out of nowhere. They are made inside bodies that may be tired, hungry, overstimulated, grieving, in pain, managing a chronic condition, navigating a busy household, or carrying the invisible work of getting through the day.

For neurodivergent people, sensory input and internal signals can add another layer. Hunger may arrive late or all at once. Certain textures, smells, temperatures, or sounds may make a meal feel less accessible. A crowded store may take more energy than the food it is meant to provide. These experiences are real information. They aren't a character flaw or something to push past through with sheer force.

What somatic support actually means

"Somatic" means *of the body*.

In this context, somatic support is not about performing calmness or convincing yourself that everything is fine. It is about learning to **notice what your body is communicating** and offering

it small conditions of safety, comfort, or steadiness when you can.
Sometimes that may look like sitting down before you eat.

Sometimes it may look like choosing the familiar food because unfamiliar food is too much today.

Sometimes it is taking three slower breaths before opening the refrigerator, before taking a bite, before knowing you are readying yourself to make a decision. These breathes aren't to become perfectly regulated, but to create one small pause between overwhelm and reaction.

The goal is not to control the body.

The goal is to become more collaborative with it.

This matters because sustained stress can affect far more than mood. The autonomic nervous system is involved in digestive function, cardiovascular activity, and other involuntary processes that help the body respond and adapt (Waxenbaum et al., 2025). We do not need to turn every symptom into a nervous-system story, but we also do not need to pretend that stress, capacity, sensory load, and physical health have nothing to do with one another.

A different question

Instead of asking, “Why can’t I just do this?”

Try asking:

What is my body asking for before this task can become possible?

The answer may be practical rather than profound.

Maybe you need a quieter kitchen, or food prepared before you are depleted. Maybe you need to eat the same breakfast for a while or fewer decisions.

These are not shortcuts around health. They are part of building a life in which health-supportive choices are more available.

A small practice: pause, notice, support

The next time you feel stuck around food, movement, or another health habit, try this:

Pause.

Put both feet on the floor, if that is comfortable. Let your shoulders drop a fraction. Notice one thing you can see.

Notice.

Ask: *What is happening in my body right now?*

You do not need a perfect answer. You might notice tightness, buzzing, fatigue, nausea, urgency, hunger, or nothing at all.

Support.

Ask: *What is one thing that would make the next five minutes easier?*

Water. A snack. A quieter room. A few breaths. A seated meal. Texting someone. Choosing the simplest available option.

Small supports can sound almost too simple. But simple is not the same as insignificant. Repeated moments of noticing and responding help move health behavior out of the realm of self-punishment and into the realm of care.

You do not have to earn care by being productive enough, disciplined enough, or calm enough first.

Your body is not an obstacle standing between you and the person you want to become.

It is where becoming happens.

References

Waxenbaum, J. A., Reddy, V., & Varacallo, M. (2025). *Anatomy, autonomic nervous system*. StatPearls Publishing. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK539845/>