

EP4 - From burnout to balance: Strategies to heal your nervous system

Laura (00:00.85)

In episode four of the Pivot Academy podcast, we are talking about the incredibly important topic of nervous system regulation. So if you are struggling with overwhelm or anxiety, or if you've been trying to create changes in your life, but your busy brain just seems to keep creating roadblocks, then this episode is absolutely for you. We are going to talk about how you can create massive change in your life.

by giving your nervous system some TLC. And I'm going to share my personal journey of overcoming burnout and repairing my nervous system. Let's dive in.

Laura (00:45.906)

Hey, beautiful and welcome back to the show. I am so excited for this conversation with you today because we are diving into a topic that I truly believe is foundational in creating positive lasting change in your life. And that is nervous system regulation. So for everything that we talk about today, that can all be found over in the show notes at [laurataylor .com .au](http://laurataylor.com.au) forward slash four.

Now, I completely understand that the topic of nervous system regulation may not sound like the sexiest topic, but I assure you it is an absolute essential. And if I look back on my own wellness journey that has spanned well over a decade now, I wish someone had told me these fundamentals at the beginning, because it seriously would have saved me so much time.

so much frustration and just so much trial and error. And I don't want you to waste the years that I did trying to figure out why you're not able to implement the changes in your life that you want to because you absolutely deserve to be living the life of your dreams. And I believe so passionately that regulating our nervous system is often a huge missing piece of the puzzle.

So let's start with a fundamental truth. If your nervous system is dysregulated, your brain is simply not in a state to think clearly, let alone allow you to have the mental bandwidth to be creative, which is often the state that we need to be in when we're creating the blueprint for how we are going to make changes in our life. Because when we're stuck in a state of stress,

our brain operates in survival mode. And that completely hinders our ability to access not only our intuition, but also to be able to make thoughtful decisions and pursue our dreams.

Laura (03:01.842)

Because when we're stuck in a state of stress, our brain operates in survival mode, which not only hinders our ability to access our intuition, but we're unable to make thoughtful decisions and pursue our dreams. And once I finally wrapped my head around this idea that essentially until I regulated my nervous system, I was not going to be able to create the changes in my life that I really wanted to.

I honestly had to laugh at myself a little bit because I had practiced as a vet for 10 years and I worked in an animal shelter where every day I tried to support stressed and dysregulated

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animals and behavioral medicine was one of my absolute favorite areas. And the reason for that was that I recognized very early on in my vet days that the welfare and

quality of life of the animals in my care was so intrinsically linked to their mental health and their behavior. And, you know, I frequently explain to colleagues and students that, put simply, an animal's brain is like a set of traffic lights. They're either operating in green, orange or red. So when they're in green, they're nice and calm and they're regulated and then they're feeling pretty happy. But...

Once that amygdala in their brain goes off, which is the little alarm system in the brain that's triggered when they find something stressful, then they move into orange and they start to feel agitated and not quite as happy. Then once their stress continues to escalate, they move into red. Now, this is when they're completely dysregulated and that's really evident in their behavior.

Just like in people, a really stressed person is not going to be behaving at their best. And that's because they're not engaged with their thinking brain. They're not able to function at their highest self. And it's just so similar between people and animals. And once I really started to hone into this idea that to improve my mental health, my physical health, and then...

Laura (05:28.562)

implement the changes that I wanted in my life, the key sat with regulating or the initial step really sat with regulating my nervous system. And when you think about it, it just makes logical sense because if you're not able to think clearly and make calm, effective decisions, then you are certainly not going to be able to tap into your intuitive, creative side, which is just so important if you are wanting to make

big changes in your life, like changing your career or starting a business, for example. And so for me, I had been working as a vet for about three years. And after a very long road of getting to this point, which I go into detail about in episode two, if you want to go back and check that one out, I completely crashed physically and mentally. I was burnt out and

My nervous system was just completely dysregulated. Mentally, I was living in a fairly constant state of anxiety and exhaustion. I felt wired but tired all the time. And physically, I was not in a great state either. So my skin was in a constant state of breakout. I had really intense GIT symptoms. I was underweight. My hormones were just...

all over the place and I was dealing with severe endometriosis and I didn't sleep very well. And for me, I really did hit rock bottom. My nervous system, which had just been in that heightened red state for so long, came crashing down and it had massive flow -on effects to both my physical and mental health. But...

This is not everyone's story. And there are a lot of people who go along for many years, kind of just living in orange and their nervous system isn't completely crashing on them, but they are still in a state of dysregulation. And I often think of it in terms of the analogy of a feather, brick and truck scenario. And so your body and the universe,

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Laura (07:51.794)

If your nervous system is dysregulated, we'll start by giving you subtle little signs that things are out of alignment and that's your feather. And perhaps this is that you're feeling more stressed than usual, you're not sleeping as well. But if you don't make changes and you don't listen to these subtle feather signs that you're out of alignment, then things are going to step up a level.

And that's when you generally get hit by a brick. And so that might be, you know, for example, your skin really is breaking out all the time or that your weight is really fluctuating. Now, again, if you don't listen to these messages and you keep pushing through and not stopping and not making attempts to regulate your nervous system, eventually the truck will come.

Okay. Eventually you will get hit by a truck. Now I know that sounds very dramatic, but it's the analogy, as I said, of the feather, brick and truck scenario in that if your nervous system continues to operate in a state of stress and dysregulation, eventually something has to give. And for me, it was a very dramatic truck crash, physically.

Mentally, I was completely frazzled. And I think it's really sad that in today's fast paced society, many of us, especially women, do live in a state of nervous system dysregulation without even realizing it. They're often, you know, and I was certainly for many years, just kind of functioning in orange and...

Chronic stress, I think, has just become so normalized that we often overlook the signs, we often overlook our feathers or our bricks, that our nervous system is out of balance. So nervous system dysregulation can look different for everyone, but some of the common symptoms and ones that I certainly experienced were persistent anxiety or worry, difficulty sleeping,

Laura (10:11.794)

chronic fatigue or constantly feeling tired, irritability and mood swings, difficulty concentrating and of course physical symptoms like we spoke about and they can range but some other things may be headaches, muscle tension or digestive issues. And like we spoke about, these symptoms are signals from your body that it is time to pay attention and make changes.

And after years of trial and error, I finally found a way or ways multiple to regulate my nervous system and move out of burnout. Because ultimately that's what happened to me. Once my nervous system had, had, had existed in that red hyper arousal, dysregulated state for so many years and everything came crashing down, I ended up in complete burnout and.

This placed me in a position to get in tune with my intuition and to design ultimately my life intentionally because that was the only way for me that I could move out of things. I had to reset. I had to ground myself and I had to rebuild. And I also just wanted to point out that I am certainly not suggesting that we avoid feeling stressed at all.

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Feeling stressed and anxious at times is absolutely normal. It's part of the human experience. But if you are feeling frequently like you're in a state of stress and dysregulation, then this is when you are at risk of moving into burnout. Because like I mentioned before, your nervous system just can't operate like that forever. Plus,

you are not going to be in a state of being able to create positive changes in your life in whatever area you're wanting to do that. So now let's talk about how you can recognise if your nervous system is stressed because there may be many of you listening who think, I kind of get stressed, but is that normal? Is that not normal? And like I mentioned before, I think

Laura (12:36.242)

think we can get accustomed to living in red and not actually realizing that it's not normal and that level of dysregulation is detrimental to our overall health. So the first step to figuring out whether your nervous system is dysregulated and whether you are in a constant state of stress is to tune into your body to pay attention.

to how you are feeling throughout the day. Are you constantly on edge? Do you feel a tightness in your chest or a knot in your stomach? Because these physical sensations are clues that your nervous system might be in overdrive. And I know from personal experience, I was in a constant state of dysregulation all those years ago as a vet.

I was completely disconnected from my body. You know, I was on the go, I was either oblivious to the symptoms or I would just ignore them. And had somebody have said to me all those years ago, Laura, do you think maybe you're a tad on the stress side? Or do you think maybe your nervous system is in overdrive and you're physically and mentally not doing that well?

I truly don't think I would have been able to recognise that because as I said, I was just so disconnected from my body. So this is the first step, connecting and tuning into your body. So it's really simple trick that I have for you to do this is to set a timer on your phone for four times during the day. So pick any four times I would suggest doing first thing when you wake up.

then probably mid morning, mid afternoon, and then again in the evening before you go to bed. Now, when your timer goes off, pause what you're doing, and I want you to do a mental check -in. How are you feeling? Then without analyzing it, without overthinking your initial response to that question, jot it down in a diary and do this for seven days. After these seven days,

Laura (14:57.65)

I want you to have a look at what you've jotted down at those four times every day for seven days and have a look at what you've written. It sounds so simple, but you might notice a trend that you have written things like, feeling stressed, you know, feeling nauseous. I'm feeling really tense in my shoulders. Have a look at how you've felt when you've done those regular check -ins.

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And keep in mind that the physical symptoms are only half of the picture here. So when your timer goes off, yes, of course, notice the physical symptoms, but also notice mentally what's going on. Are your thoughts racing? Are they repetitive? Are you finding it hard to concentrate or make a decision? Because these are signs that your brain is stuck in a stress response. Okay.

So now that we have gone over what a dysregulated nervous system means and how you can start to recognise if you're in this state, let's get into covering what we can actually do if we are in this state, which is seriously a topic that I love so much because I know firsthand how the quality of my life improved once I was able to regulate my nervous system and calm my anxious mind.

Now, before we get into some specific techniques, I just want to preface this by saying, I really do believe that to reap the benefits of a regulated nervous system, it truly has to be a holistic approach. And what I mean by that, for example, is that if you are implementing, let's say meditation into your daily routine,

but you're not serving your body by nourishing it with quality food, then don't be shocked that the results may not be what you're hoping for. Now, I'm absolutely not saying that we need to be perfect. This is not about perfection because I have been there and that's not a good place for your nervous system either. But it's...

Laura (17:20.562)

about acknowledging and creating awareness that how you look after your body and your mind in all areas is going to affect your nervous system. So if you're eating beautifully nourishing organic food, but you're not prioritizing your sleep, you guessed it, this is going to have an effect on your physical and mental health and subsequently your nervous system.

So I am going to give you five things that I have done in my life that have been absolute game changers for me in turning the health of my nervous system around over the last 10 years.

Laura (18:30.898)

Now I will say that these strategies can absolutely be used as a band -aid approach. And what I mean by that is that they can be used in moments of stress for sure. Utilise them to support you in stressful moments. They are going to be effective in bringing you out of red into orange and then hopefully into green. However, once you have gotten the hang of relying on these tools in moments of stress,

I'd recommend going one step further and embracing them as a lifestyle because it truly is the small things that you do consistently on a daily basis that really move the needle. And once I did this, I permanently started living out of red. I firstly dropped into orange and then eventually into green.

Now do I still have moments of red and intense feelings of anxiety and abs -

Do I still have moments of

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Laura (19:46.481)

Do I still have moments of red and intense feelings of anxiety, for example? Absolutely. But my nervous system is no longer completely frazzled and on edge 24 seven. So when I do have my moments of red, I move through them with minimal discomfort and I can return to operating in green. Now,

I do hope I haven't lost you too much with all the talk of animal brains and traffic lights. So without further ado, the five ways that you can start to regulate your nervous system today are firstly, substitute processed food for real food because the food you eat directly impacts your nervous system.

Okay, a lot of processed food has preservatives in it that are neurotoxins. A lot of the food in supermarkets have chemicals in it that are neurotoxins. And this blew my mind when I started to uncover this truth and really become passionate about learning more on this topic. That's probably a whole other podcast, but to keep it simple, here are my tips for you. Firstly,

Always read the ingredients on food packaging and if you don't understand something that is on it or if it reads like something from a high school chemistry class, then steer clear of it. Secondly, eat organic where you can. In our family, this is a really high value of ours and so we only eat organic. However,

I recognize that I'm saying this from a place of such privilege. So if you are going to start to prioritize foods to eat organic, I would recommend having a look at the Dirty Dozen and Clean 15 guidelines to support you in deciding which foods to really prioritize as organic. And I'll link to that in the show notes for you. So that will be over at [laurataylor .com .au](http://laurataylor.com.au).

Laura (22:07.41)

Now, number two for the second way that you can start to regulate your nervous system today is create a designated time for mindfulness every day. Now, this can look however you want it to look. The main thing though is to choose a time of the day that you can be consistent with, whether that is meditation or doing an activity like coloring in.

just something that shifts your nervous system from a state of stress to a state of calm. And for me, I've been meditating consistently now for four years. It took a little bit of trial and error for me to find the style that suited me. And for years, I was one of those people, which you may very well be too, that said, I just can't do meditation. It's not for me. Anyway,

Once I decided to really commit to it, I truly now can't imagine not doing it. And you know, the science is there. Meditation literally rewires our brains. It supports neurogenesis, which is the production of new brain cells. It supports neuroplasticity, which is the growth of new neural pathways, plus a whole bunch of other physiological benefits. So,

If you are open and willing to give meditation a go, that is absolutely a mindfulness practice that I would completely suggest that you try out. If you're new to it, you can start by doing some guided meditations, which gives a really beautiful foundation for how to start

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meditation. And there's so many free and paid versions online. There are apps like Headspace and Insight Timer. Whatever you do though,

It's just picking an activity of mindfulness and trying to be consistent with the time of day that you do it. Tip number three for regulating your nervous system, move your body. Now, regular exercise, we know this. It is such a powerful tool for regulating your nervous system, whether it's a gentle yoga session or a brisk walk or a more intense workout.

Laura (24:31.634)

It all promotes relaxation, it gets your happy hormones moving and it releases stress hormones. My top two tips in relation to moving your body is firstly put it in your schedule because if it's not there, it's probably not going to happen. So make moving your body an important task just like you would for a work meeting.

it in your schedule so you know you have the time created to do that. Secondly, secondly, do something that you enjoy. It seems like such a simple concept, but something that took me a long time to actually do. So I was a runner for years, all through uni and my early years as a vet, I ran

consistently, six K's, five days a week, sometimes seven days a week, depending on my week. Now, I can recognise now that this was not coming from a place of self-love. It was a coping mechanism of, not a very good one, but it was a way of me trying to relieve my anxiety. And I didn't really enjoy it.

Now for my exercise, it depends on the day, it depends on where I am in my cycle, it depends on how I'm feeling, I really tap into intuitive movement. So some mornings it's a walk, sometimes it's yoga, sometimes it's, it's doing some weight training at home, it really does depend, but it's what I enjoy at that point in time and

I think that's a huge part of it. So figure out what you enjoy doing and then again, consistently implement it.

Laura (26:35.602)

Number four.

Laura (26:40.082)

The fourth way that you can start to regulate your nervous system today is to connect with nature. Spending time in nature has a calming effect on our nervous system. So try to incorporate some outdoor time into your routine. Whether it is as simple as going and standing out on the grass with your bare feet. It can be so simple.

We're really fortunate to live right on the edge of a beautiful national park. So every day I get out there, even if it's just for a short 20 minutes and I immerse myself in nature and my nervous system just feels so calm and regulated after I do that. So figure out how that looks for you. As I said, it can be as simple as taking off your shoes and going and standing on your grass.

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for 10 minutes every day. It's free, it's easy, and just notice the difference in your nervous system and your stress levels once you have done this. Mother nature, seriously, she's, yeah, she just knows.

Laura (27:55.25)

Mother nature, seriously, she knows. And number five, healthy boundaries. Learning to say no and setting healthy boundaries is crucial for managing stress and regulating our nervous systems. Now, this was a super tricky one for me and at times it still is. I generally don't want to disappoint people and

I used to just say yes to everything. And I do know that this is something that a lot of people struggle with. So my two tips here, firstly, have a response ready for when someone asks you to do something. Okay. So an example could be, let me check my diary and I'll get back to you. Have that response prepared and ready to go.

because it means that you're less likely to feel stressed and panic and say yes to something that you later regret. Now I'm more comfortable with just saying, no thanks, I'm unable to do that. But at first, getting used to that can be really, really challenging. And so have that prepared response. My second tip is then that unless you want to do something, say no.

It is okay for you to say no if you don't want to do something. I know that's a big concept for many of us to wrap our head around, but if you don't want to do something, then don't do it. And I know that can sound a bit rash, but please hear me when I say again, it is okay to say no.

If something does not feel aligned and if it is not a full body yes, then make it a no thank you.

Laura (29:53.906)

Now I realize that those five strategies to regulating your nervous system may seem simple and easy. And that is the whole point. I mean, I love biohacking tools. I mean, I love biohacking tools as much as the next person, but it's been my personal experience that these tried and tested strategies when implemented consistently are really powerful.

And there are a lot more strategies that I have for you to try. In fact, I've written a whole ebook on this topic because I am just so passionate about it and know how regulating our nervous system really means that you'll be able to think clearly, reduce your anxiety, access your intuition, and then create a life that is truly aligned with your values and dreams. So to get your hands on my free ebook, which I've written,

10 simple practices to regulate your nervous system and calm your anxiety. If you haven't already gotten it, go to [laurataylor .com .au](http://laurataylor.com.au) forward slash regulate. And all of those 10 strategies are different to the ones that we've discussed today. So just to recap, the five ways that you can start to regulate your nervous system today are one, substitute processed food for real

2. Create a designated time for mindfulness every day. 3. Move your body. 4. Connect with nature. 5. Create healthy boundaries.

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Laura (31:41.65)

So beautiful. That brings us to the end of today's episode. I hope you found these insights helpful and inspiring. I would love so much to hear which of these practices you are going to implement or if you have other practices that have really supported your nervous system. I absolutely love hearing from you and connecting with you. So head over to Instagram. I'm at pivot with Laura. And before we wrap up,

I just wanted to say how grateful I am that you joined me today. Our time is our greatest asset and I truly appreciate that you chose to spend some of your time with me today. And if you know someone who could benefit from this episode, please be sure to share it with them right now. Plus, if you haven't already, subscribe to the podcast. This means that new episodes will appear automatically every week and that you don't have to go searching for them.

I would also be so grateful if you have a moment to leave a review. This helps the podcast to grow and it means that we can support as many people as possible, implement positive changes into their life. And until next time, beautiful, keep nurturing your growth, embracing change and believing in the power of your journey. Thank you for being part of the Pivot Academy community. Keep pivoting towards your dreams and I'll see you in the next episode.