

A Deep Dive Into

Somatics

&

Somatic Healing

for the

*Stressed Out, Burned to a Crisp,
Overwhelmed & Anxious*

Dental Hygienist



First Things First...

When I talk about **somatic** healing and *regulating* the nervous system, I'm referring to the Somatic Nervous System as well as the Parasympathetic Nervous System.

So what is the **Somatic Nervous System**? I didn't learn about it in my anatomy classes in college and it wasn't something talked about in hygiene school.

To understand **Somatics**, let's back up and look at the nervous system as a whole.



First Things First...

The nervous system is divided into the *Central Nervous System* (CNS) and the *Peripheral Nervous System* (PNS).

The CNS includes the brain and spinal cord- it deals with our senses.

The PNS includes all of the other nerves that extend from the spinal cord and throughout the rest of the body, and it keeps us **in touch** with our surroundings/*physical environment* by sending information (touch, temperature, etc).

Now, let's take a closer look at the PNS which controls involuntary bodily functions like heart rate, respiration, digestion, and blood pressure.



First Things First...

The PNS is divided into 2 different parts: the *Autonomic Nervous System* (ANS) and the *Somatic Nervous System*.

If we go even deeper, the ANS breaks down into 3 **parts** and includes the:

Sympathetic Nervous System- responsible for fight-flight and removing us from danger.

Parasympathetic Nervous System- responsible for rest-digest; involuntary body functions.

Enteric Nervous Systems- sometimes called the "brain in the gut" because of its complex relationship with digestion.



The Somatic Nervous System

So what's the **Somatic Nervous System** all about?

The **Somatic Nervous System** is responsible for the body's voluntary movement and receiving external stimuli like sounds, smell, taste, and touch. It takes in the info and relays it to the brain.

And, it's responsible for reflexes like raising your hand to protect your face from an incoming softball or piece of dislodged calculus.



The Somatic Nervous System

And the **Somatic Nervous System** relates to **Somatic Healing HOW?** Don't worry- I'm getting to that.

I talk a LOT about the *Body-Mind Connection* (BMC). This is the communication line between the body and the mind/brain.

Knowing what we now know about the **Somatic Nervous System**, it makes sense that this branch of the nervous system is highly tuned to changes in our environment and sends signals to our brain that the situation is either safe or dangerous, or pleasant or painful.



Somatics & Lived Experiences

These situations and events that we go through throughout our lives make up our "*lived experiences*." We can recall some lived experiences mentally- they're memories. Other lived experiences we may not necessarily be able to recall mentally, but the body "remembers" the sensations it experienced and reacts accordingly.

From these *lived experiences*, we're able to make decisions, assumptions, judgements, and conclusions.



The Somatic NS: *An Example*

So here's a quick, **made-up** example.

When I was 10, I was bit by a husky at a friend's house. I had to have 10 stitches in my hand. I remember crying, searing pain in my hand and my stomach hurt as if I was going to get sick. I remember my friend's mom rushing me to the ER and I just wanted my own mom, but she was away on a business trip. I was scared and felt alone.

Fast forward to me now as a 38 year old. I live next to a park and there are a lot of huskies that walk the park daily. Every time I pass one, I notice that my hand starts to ache, my face feels flush, and my stomach knots up. I feel vulnerable, scared and very alone.



Somatics & Lived Experiences

THIS is what I'm talking about when I refer to *lived experiences* being “remembered.”

The huskies in the park pose no threat to me and I know that COGNITIVELY, but my body "remembers" that traumatic experience and reacts the same way it did 28yrs ago in an attempt to protect me.

It tells me to "Get out of there! It's not safe!" It pours the cortisol to help me get out of danger (cue Sympathetic Nervous System) and here comes the anxiety, the reflex to run, and the familiar stomach ache.



The Body Keeps Score

This *lived experience* and the network of communication between the body and mind is something that I both mentally remember and physically remember.

But here's the catch- *it doesn't make sense*. It doesn't make sense that ONE incident with a husky would mean that ALL incidents will be like that. But the body doesn't understand that and it holds on tight to *lived experiences* that are **traumatic** and **stressful**.

In other words, the body keeps score and unless you wipe the scorecard clean, all the unpleasant *lived experiences* continue to add up.



Dysregulation of the Nervous System

And what happens when **stress** and **trauma** *build up* in the body?

It **dysregulates** our nervous system and can show up in multiple (not fun or healthy) ways:

Physically, it can show up as exhaustion, inflammation, GI issues, difficulty sleeping, chest palpitations, and autoimmune diseases.

Mentally, it looks like anxiety, depression, mood swings, and emotional instability.

Cognitively, it may be difficult to concentrate, racing thoughts and lapses in memory.



Somatic Healing Explained

Somatics is a holistic approach to *regulating* the dysregulated nervous system.

It includes strengthening the **Mind-Body Connection**, creating **safety** within the body, and establishing new neural pathways (**neuroplasticity**) so we don't continue to use the old networks that keep us stuck, sick and anxious.

And one of the great things about **somatic healing** is that the techniques and exercises are simple and accessible to everyone. They don't take a lot of time or energy, yet they help to regulate the nervous system by *processing trauma* and difficult **emotions**, *discharging stress*, and helping with **burnout recovery** so we can finally let go and start to make steps forward toward healing.



Somatics & The BMC

Most importantly, at the **CORE** of **Somatic Healing** is the **Mind-Body Connection**.

This communication is **VITAL** to healing because we have to know what the body is experiencing and telling us (our brain).

Once we've established this *line of communication*, we're able to show up and give ourselves exactly what we need.

Maybe it's a containing hug. Maybe it's some shaking after work to release pent up stress. Maybe it's a good, long cry. Maybe it's a walk outside.



Healing Through Somatics

Whatever it is, it's important that we *acknowledge* what our body needs and then *act on it*. This is how we **process and discharge stress** and all the junk that builds up daily and throughout our lives.

I've worked for years on building a strong Mind-Body Connection and communicating back and forth with my body and mind, so I'm usually able to pinpoint why my body is feeling a certain way and then act accordingly.

But the Mind-Body Connection is something that has to be worked on. It *doesn't just happen overnight* after a 30 minute meditation or journaling session. It takes **consistent communication**, just like any relationship.



Self-Care Through Somatics

So, if you're ready to start *feeling better* physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually but you don't have a lot of *time* or *energy*, **somatics** is a great place to start.

I consider my "somatic time" as my **self-care** time. It's all inclusive- it frees and calms my mind, it relaxes my body and it helps to keep my inflammation and high cortisol levels at bay because I've *closed the stress loops* and tossed em out.



Somatics Applied

Somatic exercises take just a few minutes a day and you can pick and choose which ones fit best into your schedule or vibe with you the most.

Try em out and if you need further assistance or have questions, feel free to reach out- I'm happy to chat.

And as always, you're **NEVER** alone. 🧡

