



The Brain-Immune Connection

A patient handout — please read this week and jot down any questions. We'll address them next session.

Your brain and your immune system are always talking

Your nervous system and your immune system are not separate. They constantly send signals back and forth through nerves, hormones, and chemical messengers. This is why stress can affect physical symptoms, and why physical symptoms can affect mood, energy, and thinking. Understanding this two-way connection is the first step in working with your body rather than against it.

The nervous system's "safety switch"

A large nerve called the vagus nerve connects your brain to your heart, lungs, and gut. When your body senses safety, this system helps slow your heart rate, calm your breathing, and quiet inflammation — a "rest, digest, and repair" state. When your body senses threat, it shifts into "fight-or-flight" (revved up) or, at times, a "shut-down" state (numb, exhausted, foggy). These shifts happen automatically, below conscious awareness. The Traffic Light Check-In helps you notice which state you are in.

Where mast cells fit in

Mast cells are immune cells found throughout the body — in the skin, gut, airways, and even around nerves and in the brain. When activated, they release messengers such as histamine that can cause flushing, itching, stomach upset, palpitations, and lightheadedness. Because mast cells sit close to nerves, they both respond to and influence the nervous system. This helps explain why symptoms like brain fog, fatigue, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating can travel together with allergic-type or physical symptoms.

Why stress and symptoms can feed each other

When the nervous system stays in a "threat" state for long periods, it can keep the immune system on higher alert, and immune messengers can in turn keep the brain feeling on edge or drained. This can become a loop. The good news: because the connection runs both ways, calming the nervous system is one way to help settle the immune side too.

Why we start with awareness

This week you are simply noticing — your autonomic states and your sleep — not trying to fix or change anything. Awareness is the foundation everything else is built on. Once you can see your own patterns, the skills in the sessions ahead will have something concrete to work with.

Questions for next session: