MINDTHEORY

Why You Can't Relax
Even When Everything Is Fine



Your mind may be calm, but your nervous system can still feel unsafe. Here's why — and what you can do about it.

1 Neuroception & Threat

Your brain is always scanning for danger

Your nervous system has a built-in early warning system called neuroception. It constantly scans your environment (for signs of danger — even when there's no real threat. If something feels unfamiliar, uncertain, or "too quiet," it can still trigger a stress response.



What can trigger a threat response?

- Unfamiliar situations
- Social events
- Uncertainty about the future
- Periods of calm or silence

Your brain chooses safety over accuracy. Better safe than sorry.

2 Allostatic Load

The cost of always being "on"

When your body stays in a state of high alert for too long, it builds up **allostatic load** — the wear and tear of chronic stress. Even if life looks **fine now**, your nervous system might still be carrying the weight of past stress, responsibilities and constant mental busyness.



Signs of high allostatic load

- Constant fatigue
- Poor sleep
- Feeling on edge
- Trouble focusing

You may be safe now, but your body is still paying the price of past stress.

3 Relaxation-Induced Anxiety

Why calm can feel uncomfortable

If you've been in a stressed state for a long time, calm can actually feel strange — even unsafe. When there's no external pressure, your mind may start to scan inward, bringing up unresolved worries, old emotions or a fear that "something bad might happen." Ihe/relaxation can trigger anxiety because it's unfamiliar to your nervous system.



Common thoughts in moments of calm

- "Why do I feel anxious right now?"
- "Something bad is going to happen."
- "I should be doing something productive."
- "This calm won't last."

Calm feels uncomfortable when your nervous system is used to chaos.

4 Somatic Action Plan

Practical ways to help your nervous system feel safe

Relaxation is a skill. The more you practice, the more your nervous system learns that it's safe to slow down.

1 Physiological Sigh

Quickly calm your system



- Take a deep breath in through your nose.
- Take a second small breath in.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth.
- Repeat 3–5 times.

2 Active Discharge

Release built-up energy



- Try stretching, shaking, or a short walk.
- Dance, do a few jumps, or any movement you enjoy.
- Let your body complete the stress response.

3 Orient to Safety

Ground yourself in the present



- Look around and notice 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear.
- Remind yourself: "I am safe in this moment."
- Take slow, steady breaths.

4 Build Daily Safety Cues

Help your nervous system learn calm

- Morning light
- Gentle movement
- Time in nature
- Consistent sleep

- Get natural light in the morning.
- Move your body regularly.
- Spend time in nature.
- Keep a consistent sleep routine.
- Create small moments of calm daily.