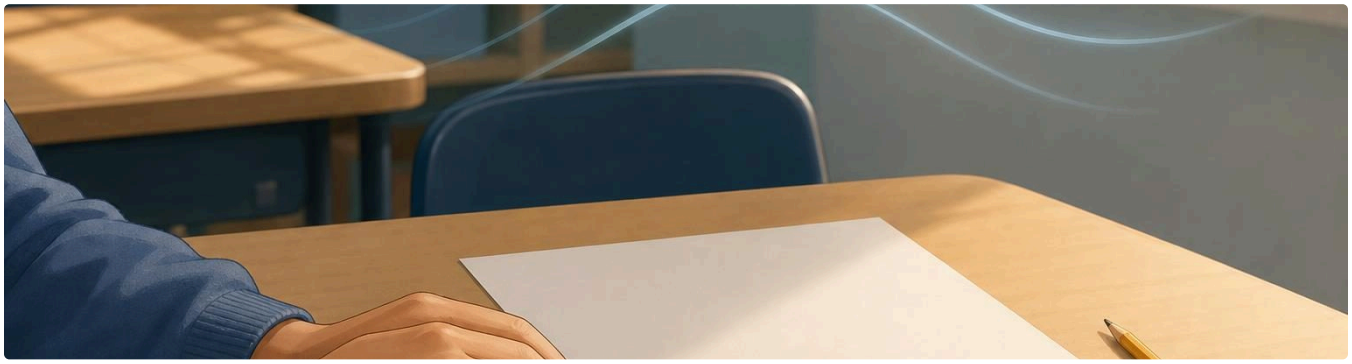
Small Habits May Help the Body Calm Down

Researchers are studying how breathing, humming, cooling, and tapping may help the body move from stress to rest.



Hands rest beside a pencil and blank worksheet as gentle lines show calm breathing.

Scientists are finding that people can help their bodies settle after **stress**, according to Science News Explores. Stress is the body's alarm system. It can make a heart beat faster. It can make breathing speed up. That can happen before a test, a game, or a hard talk. The news is not that stress exists. The news is that researchers are testing ways to calm that alarm.

Your **nervous** system is the message network inside your body. One part is called the sympathetic nervous system. It gets the body ready to act fast. Another part is called the parasympathetic nervous system. It helps the body rest again. People cannot simply order their hearts to slow down. But some actions may send helpful signals to that resting system.

One important pathway is the vagus nerve. A nerve is like a body wire that carries messages. The vagus nerve runs from the base of the brain down toward the belly. Breathing exercises can affect it. So might **cooling** the face. In one small study, researchers asked 25 people to do math in their heads. Before the math, 12 wore a cooling mask. It was meant to copy the feeling of putting a face in cold water. Everyone felt stress from the math. The cooling-mask group released less **cortisol**, a stress **hormone**. They also calmed down faster.

Scientists are also studying **humming** and tapping. Humming while breathing slowly may change heart-rate variability. That means the tiny changes in time

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between heartbeats. Higher variability can mean the body switches better between stress and rest. Tapping certain spots on the skin may also lower stress hormones. It may reduce heart rate and blood pressure. Researchers are still studying why tapping works.

There is not one perfect method for every person. Darshan Mehta, a mind-body medicine expert in Boston, told Science News Explores that practice matters most. In a classroom, this story might look very ordinary. A person feels worried, then pauses. They **breathe** slowly, hum softly, or tap gently. The body may get a message: the alarm can quiet down now.

Written from reporting by Science News Explores.

THINK IT THROUGH

1. **If a school taught one calming habit first, which should it choose, and why?**

2. **Why is it important to say these methods may help, not that they will fix stress?**

3. **How could an adult decide when a worried child needs more than a calming habit?**

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T	I	S	H	C	S	H	N	C	L	S	R
M	T	N	G	O	M	H	H	O	C	E	S
N	S	O	E	R	R	U	O	O	H	N	H
A	E	B	S	T	Q	M	O	L	P	V	T
M	N	R	E	I	E	M	O	I	V	O	D
G	H	E	V	S	U	I	L	N	T	S	N
E	S	A	T	O	T	N	A	G	E	K	H
M	D	T	E	L	U	G	N	I	C	T	T
A	O	H	M	L	G	S	T	R	E	S	S
E	L	E	E	E	C	F	T	H	S	I	S
L	N	A	O	E	H	M	C	V	G	R	I
N	R	S	T	U	C	V	E	E	R	G	O

BREATHE COOLING CORTISOL HORMONE HUMMING NERVOUS STRESS

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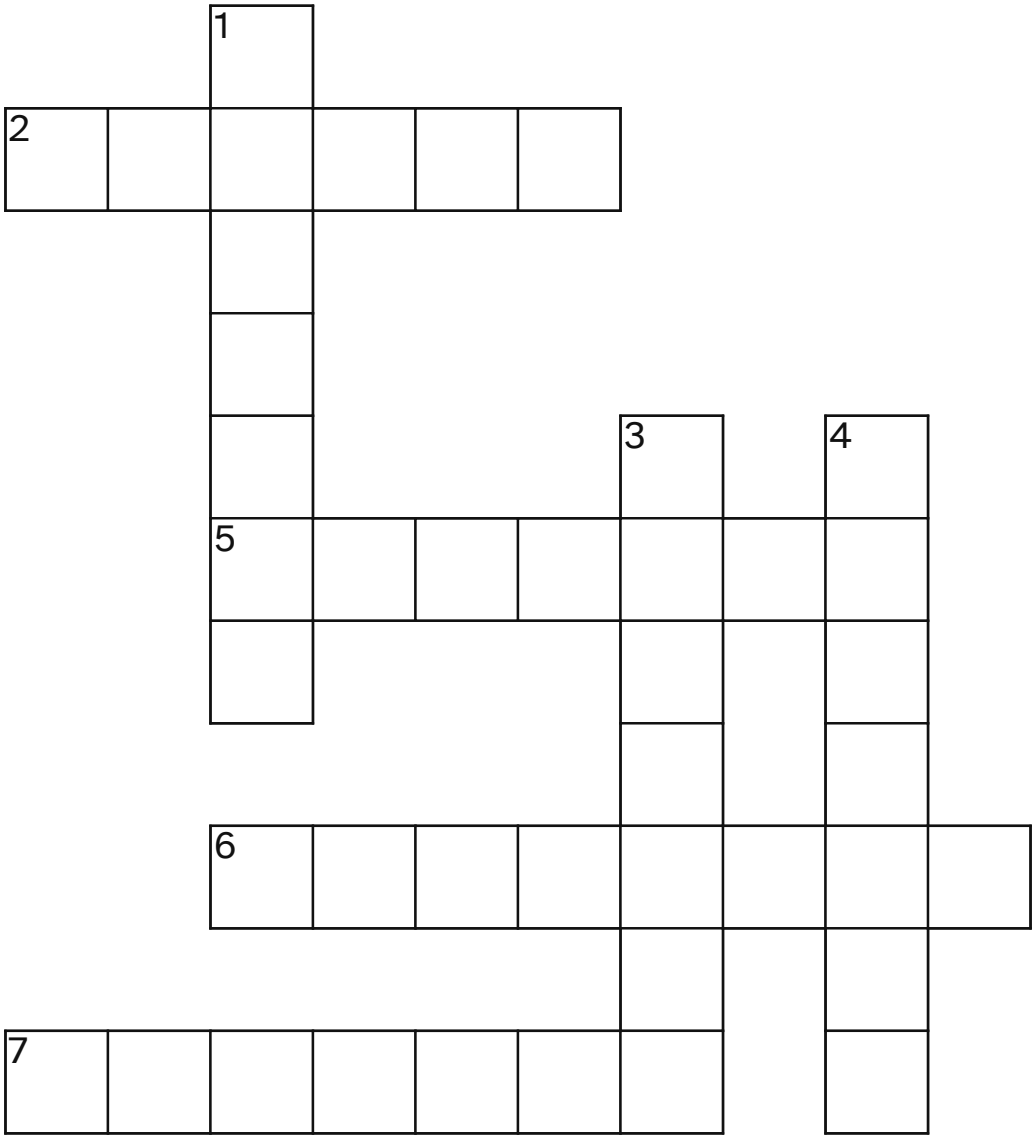

ACROSS

2 Body's alarm response to worry, challenge, or danger

5 Body chemical messenger that helps control actions

6 Body chemical that can rise during an alarm response

7 Making a low, steady sound with closed lips

DOWN

1 Move air into and out of the lungs

3 Making something less warm with cold water or a mask

4 Body network carrying messages between brain and other parts

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Where this came from

This article was written for 3andB from the reporting below. It is not a reprint — the wording is ours and the facts are theirs.

Science News Explores

"Feeling nervous? Work that system to calm it down"

Published	Monday, October 26, 2026
Read by us on	Tuesday, October 27, 2026

https://www.snexplores.org/article/regulate-nervous-system-calm-stress

WHAT IS IN THIS PACKET

The article and its discussion questions, a word search, and a crossword.

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