

Ten Minutes of Drawing Can Reset Your Nervous System

By Danielle Zickl
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The following is excerpted from the article, “How 10 minutes of drawing can reset your nervous system” by Danielle Zickl of The Washington Post, August 13, 2026.

Remember back in 2015 when everyone you knew suddenly owned a coloring book? It was a massive cultural moment, and these books promised instant stress relief.

Drawing is having a similar moment in the sun. This resurgence comes on the heels of social media’s current obsession with nervous system regulation, which refers to your body’s ability to respond to stress and return to a calm baseline afterward. “We live in a stressful economic and political climate,” said Reina Lombardi, art therapist and founder of Florida Art Therapy Services.

Lombardi adds that smartphones play a huge role in nervous system dysregulation. “They use notifications to arouse our nervous systems and keep us engaged. These devices are always on and tethered to us.”

As a result, people are searching for simple, effective ways to get out of a perpetual fight-or-flight mode. And as it turns out, spending just 10 minutes with a pencil and a piece of paper might be one of the easiest ways to do it.

How drawing resets your nervous system

When you experience stress, your body’s **sympathetic nervous system, a.k.a. the fight-or-flight response**, becomes activated. This system prepares your body to respond to perceived threats by increasing your heart rate, muscle tension, blood pressure and the release of stress hormones such as cortisol.

Drawing can help shift attention away from stressful thoughts and encourage activation of the **parasympathetic nervous system, sometimes called the ‘rest and digest’ system**.

This system promotes recovery by slowing heart rate, reducing muscle tension and helping the body return to a calmer state.

The focus and coordination required to draw, anchors your attention in the present, keeping your brain from straying toward negative thoughts like worry or overthinking.

You don't have to be an artist crafting a masterpiece to reap the calming benefits of drawing. Even just drawing lines, squiggles or geometric shapes can provide many of the same benefits.

Anywhere from five to 20 minutes of drawing may interrupt racing thoughts, reduce immediate stress and improve mood.

If drawing isn't your thing, you can still reap these rewards from other art forms.