

A woman is lying in bed, looking awake and thoughtful. She is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and is partially covered by a white blanket. The bed has a dark, tufted headboard and white pillows. The overall lighting is dim, suggesting it might be nighttime.

WHY CAN'T I SWITCH OFF?

YOU CAN KNOW YOU'RE SAFE... AND **STILL NOT FEEL SAFE.**

Have you ever laid down to rest, but your mind continued racing?
Or noticed your body staying tense even when there's no immediate danger?
Many people assume this means they're overreacting, bad at relaxing, or "doing stress wrong".

But the nervous system is designed around prediction and protection.

Its job is not simply to help us feel calm.

Its job is to help us survive.

SOMETIMES THE BODY STAYS SWITCHED ON BECAUSE THE SYSTEM HAS LEARNED THAT **SWITCHING OFF DOESN'T FEEL SAFE YET.**



The brain constantly asks:

- What should I prepare for?
- What feels familiar?
- What might happen next?

And if the system has spent long periods adapting to stress, unpredictability, overwhelm, pressure, criticism, or hypervigilance... it can become organised around alertness.

RELATABLE NERVOUS SYSTEM SIGNS

This can show up in ways people don't always recognise

- Feeling physically tired but mentally alert
- Finding silence uncomfortable
- Struggling to fully relax on holiday
- Overthinking after conversations
- Feeling restless during rest
- Constantly checking your phone
- Difficulty slowing down
- Feeling “on edge” without obvious reason
- Bracing before notifications/emails
- Feeling exhausted by uncertainty
- Being productive but never settled

These responses are not evidence that you are failing. They may reflect a nervous system that has spent time prioritising protection.

TINY REFLECTIVE SECTION:

Which of these feels most familiar to you?

Racing thoughts ☐

Physical tension ☐

Difficulty resting ☐

Feeling constantly alert ☐

Overpreparing ☐

Difficulty switching off ☐

Notes...

FROM SELF-BLAME TO UNDERSTANDING

Re-frames

Instead of:

“Why am I like this?”

Try:

“What has my system learned to expect?”

Instead of:

“I should be coping better.”

Try:

“My nervous system may still be organised around protection.”

Instead of:

“I just need to relax.”

Try:

“Safety is a physiological experience, not just a logical one.”

REFLECTION PROMPTS

1. When does my body feel most alert?

2. What situations feel hardest to fully switch off from?

3. What changes when I view these responses through the lens of protection rather than failure?

“Understanding the system can sometimes soften the way we relate to ourselves.”