

What Does My HRV Tell Me (in Scientific Terms) ?

- Our bodies, organs and brain have many different “systems” such as the cardiovascular system and the autonomic nervous system. These systems are interconnected and work together closely to keep the body functioning. For example, when we stand from lying down or are doing exercise, our heart rate increases, and our blood pressure adjusts, keeping the correct amount of blood flowing to all parts of the body. When we see something that frightens us, our heart rate increases and our blood flows to our muscles in preparation for flight from the danger.
- The autonomic nervous system (ANS) controls many automatic functions such as heart rate, digestion, respiration and blood pressure and is divided into two subsystems: the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems. In general, these two subsystems are in a constant dance to keep the body in balance. However, when danger is present, the sympathetic subsystem takes over in what is called the “fight or flight” response. Fight or flight is a stressful state and evolved to protect us from danger. Once the danger has past, the ANS returns to balance.

- As it turns out, the pattern of the heart beat (HRV) is a reflection of what your autonomic nervous system is doing. Because of this, HRV can be used to measure the sympathetic nervous system and the fight or flight response. Also, because the nervous system, heart rate, blood pressure regulation and respiration are under control of the autonomic nervous system HRV is an excellent indicator of many health parameters.
- Low HRV is a symptom of stress and imbalance in the nervous system. This imbalance can be transitory, such as the case of temporary stress or it can be a persistent imbalance caused by busy, hectic and stressful lives inducing a constant state of fight or flight response.
- The good news is that there are many practices people can do to balance their nervous systems and increase their HRV and overall health. These practices range from simple slow, deep breathing to exercise and nutrition, to modification of perception and belief systems. Deep breathing naturally balances the nervous system, exercise helps decrease stress hormones and increase endorphins, while modification of perception changes how we see a situation and whether or not it causes stress for us.