CASE STUDY #3

nerva®

Patient case study: Targeting nervous system dysregulation to improve dietary tolerance

A neuroregulatory approach restored confidence and tolerance in long-standing IBS.

“Her nervous system was so overstimulated and it wasn’t just gut sensitivity – it was about her whole stress response.”

Bonnie Wisener, Nutritionist

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The years it took to find meaningful relief from IBS.

After years of restriction and flare-related fear, a woman with IBS improved bowel stability and dietary tolerance by addressing nervous system dysregulation, guided by nutritionist Bonnie Wisener from Shift Nutrition and Wellness.

Key takeaways

- **Brain-gut therapy unlocked dietary expansion**
  Nervous system regulation supported safe, successful food reintroduction for the patient after years of restriction and symptom unpredictability.
- **Nerva was anchored within existing behavioural changes**
  Integrating Nerva alongside improved sleep, meal timing, and stress routines increased adherence and helped the patient make connections between nervous system inputs and gut symptoms.
- **Explaining the 'why' increased buy-in**
  Framing gut-directed hypnotherapy using clinical language (visceral hypersensitivity, brain imaging) helped reduce stigma and validated the patient's experience – an approach applicable across disciplines.

Clinical context: A decade of stalled progress marked by dietary rigidity and nervous system dysregulation

At presentation, the patient reported bloating, urgency, and erratic bowel habits despite years of dietary intervention, SIBO testing, and GI consults.

Her self-managed low FODMAP diet had become increasingly restrictive, and she often skipped meals before work to avoid flares. Sleep disruption, late-night eating, and heightened stress further compounded her symptoms.

Bonnie identified a pattern of nervous system overstimulation and worked to stabilize her daily routines before layering in gut-brain therapy – addressing the underlying drivers of her reactivity.

"She was stuck in a chronic pattern – erratic eating, strong food fear, skipping meals. We had to step away from food as the only solution and target what was really driving her symptoms."

Intervention: Introducing Nerva to target nervous system dysregulation

Bonnie first helped the patient stabilize erratic routines – irregular meals, late-night eating, and poor sleep – before introducing Nerva to calm autonomic reactivity. "She need more than food reintroduction," Bonnie said. "What she needed was a shift in awareness."

"Nerva gave her that first nudge – it helped her pause, reflect, and become more strategic about how she responded to symptoms. Without that initial nervous system recalibration, I don't think subsequent interventions would have been as well tolerated."

By introducing Nerva after stabilizing foundational routines, Bonnie helped the patient regulate her autonomic nervous system enough to tolerate further interventions. This shift laid the groundwork for greater interoceptive awareness and dietary flexibility.

Key intervention elements included:

- **Stabilizing daily rhythms**
  Guided the patient to establish regular meal timing, avoid late-night eating, and improve sleep hygiene to reduce overall stress load.

- **Early gut-brain therapy**
  Introduced Nerva's six-week program as a low-barrier, structured entry point to modulate autonomic reactivity and interrupt symptom anticipation cycles.

- **Building interoceptive awareness**
  Framed Nerva as a way to observe and reframe gut sensations, reducing fear-driven interpretation and improving cognitive flexibility around symptoms.

- **Preparing for next-phase therapy**
  Used the initial nervous system recalibration from Nerva to enable a smoother transition to one-on-one gut-directed hypnotherapy and dietary expansion.

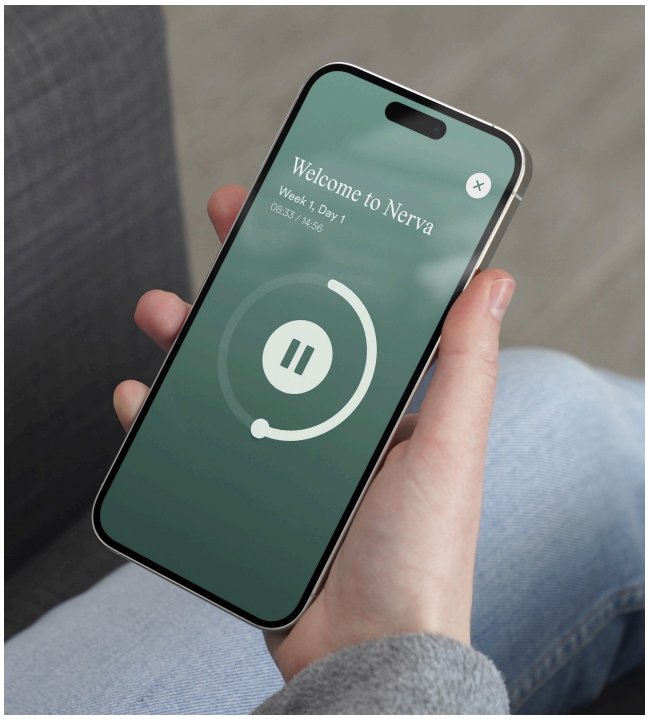
"She was highly sensitive and had limited bandwidth. Nerva gave her a low-barrier entry point – it was structured and self-guided, but still powerful."

Outcomes: Functional gains and greater nervous system resilience

Following completion of the Nerva program, the patient demonstrated several functionally significant improvements that guided the next phase of care:

- **Stabilized bowel patterns**
  Bowel regularity improved, with fewer episodes of urgency and increased predictability, enabling greater confidence in daily life.

- **Reduced symptom escalation**
  "Before, attending something like a wedding meant spending the evening in the bathroom. After Nerva, she managed a full evening event symptom-free. That predictability was entirely new for her."



- **Improved tolerance for uncertainty and symptom fluctuation**
  The patient became less reactive to occasional flare-ups and was able to distinguish between food-related and nervous system-driven symptoms.

- **Greater cognitive flexibility and clinical engagement**
  The patient became more open to non-dietary strategies and more engaged in care, ultimately choosing to pursue in-person gut-directed hypnotherapy to reinforce early nervous system gains.

After completing Nerva's digital program, the patient decided to try in-person hypnotherapy – a decision Bonnie fully supported. "It can be incredibly helpful but it's rarely an option I can suggest as there are just so few qualified providers. Most patients simply don't have access."

"That's what makes Nerva so clinically valuable – it offers a starting point that's structured, scalable, and evidence-based. And I can get patients started right away."

Provider insights: Supporting safety and structure

- **Foster readiness before reintroduction**
  Nervous system dysregulation can keep patients stuck in restrictive patterns. Helping them feel physiologically safe is often the first step toward dietary expansion.

- **Leverage low-barrier tools when access is limited**
  Structured, self-guided programs like Nerva fill a critical gap for patients who cannot access one-on-one hypnotherapy.

- **Balance structure with flexibility**
  Even when adherence is imperfect, introducing gut-brain therapy early can shift awareness and reduce rigidity, making patients more open to future interventions.

- **Look beyond the gut**
  IBS symptoms often reflect a heightened stress response. Addressing nervous system inputs can improve both gastrointestinal and emotional resilience.

Bonnie effectively demonstrated how addressing the nervous system can shift how patients interpret symptoms, making room for new patterns and meaningful, sustained progress.

Even small changes in awareness can reduce food-related fears, foster flexibility, and support reintroduction over time.

"We're not just trying to calm symptoms – we're helping patients build the neural and emotional flexibility they need to recover function and quality of life."