

Slow Down to Tune In

A practical guide to reducing the speed of autopilot long enough to notice your body, emotions, needs, capacity and environment - so your next choice can be more intentional.

Why slowing down matters

Modern life rewards speed. Messages arrive instantly, tasks overlap and many people move through the day responding before they have had time to notice what is happening internally. When this becomes habitual, early signals of stress, hunger, fatigue, overload, resentment or anxiety can be missed until they become much louder.

Slowing down does not mean becoming unproductive. It means creating enough space to receive information from yourself. A ten-second pause can sometimes prevent an automatic yes, an avoidable argument or another hour of pushing beyond capacity.

Tune in to five areas

- **Body:** tension, pain, temperature, hunger, thirst, fatigue, restlessness or heaviness.
- **Emotion:** anxious, frustrated, sad, lonely, pressured, relieved, hopeful, numb or unsure.
- **Thoughts:** racing, looping, self-critical, scattered, blank or focused.
- **Sensory load:** sound, light, touch, movement, clutter, people and interruptions.
- **Capacity:** what you realistically have available now, not what you expected to have.

Carl Rogers and listening inward

Person-centred practice values genuine contact with our lived experience. Rather than immediately correcting or dismissing what we feel, we can become curious about it. This does not mean every feeling dictates our behaviour; it means our choices are better informed.

"The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." - Carl R. Rogers, On Becoming a Person (1961).

The 30-second tune-in

- Stop adding another task.
- Notice where your body is supported.
- Ask: What is strongest in me right now?
- Ask: What am I needing - physically, emotionally, practically or relationally?
- Choose one response that is realistic for the next few minutes.

Do not turn awareness into another test

There is no requirement to identify the perfect emotion or achieve calm. 'I feel strange, tired and overloaded' is enough information to begin. If internal awareness is difficult, start with observable facts: I am clenching my jaw; I have reread the same sentence four times; noise suddenly feels unbearable; I have not eaten.

From Autopilot to Choice

Signs you may be moving too fast

- You answer requests before checking your diary or energy.
- You realise hours later that you were hungry, thirsty or in pain.
- You become suddenly irritable after appearing to cope all day.
- You keep adding tasks because stopping feels uncomfortable.
- You struggle to remember what you have just done.
- You are making decisions mainly to reduce immediate pressure.
- You are masking distress until you reach shutdown or exhaustion.

Slow down before saying yes

A useful pause phrase is: 'Let me check and come back to you.' It creates time to ask whether you have the time, energy and willingness to agree. Consider what the yes will displace. Boundaries are easier to set before commitment than after depletion.

Slow down during emotional intensity

When activation is high, the priority may be regulation rather than analysis. Reduce stimulation, postpone non-urgent decisions, move to a safer or quieter environment and use familiar grounding. Once the intensity reduces, reflect on what the emotion was communicating.

Neurodivergence: tuning in may work differently

Autistic and ADHD people may experience interoceptive differences, hyperfocus, delayed emotional processing, sensory overload or difficulty switching attention. 'Just listen to your body' may therefore be too vague. External prompts and concrete questions can make self-awareness more accessible.

Neurodivergent-friendly prompts

- Has my tolerance for noise or conversation changed?
- Am I stuck in hyperfocus and missing food, drink or movement?
- Do I need transition time before the next demand?
- Is my brain seeking stimulation or trying to escape too much stimulation?
- Am I masking so heavily that I cannot tell what I need?
- Would a number, colour or visual scale be easier than an emotion word?

Tune in to the environment

Sometimes the problem is not inside you. A room may be too noisy, expectations unreasonable, a relationship unsafe or workload unsustainable. Self-regulation should not become a way of adapting indefinitely to harmful circumstances. Ask what needs to change around you as well as within you.

Slow down around coping behaviours

Scrolling, alcohol, food behaviours, shopping, overworking or withdrawing can provide quick relief. Before judging the behaviour, ask what it is trying to do: numb, soothe, stimulate, escape, connect or create control. Understanding the need makes alternative coping more targeted.

A one-minute reset between tasks

- Finish the current task deliberately.
- Unclench one area of tension.
- Check food, drink, toilet, pain and medication needs.
- Notice sensory load.
- Decide whether the next task is still the right next task.

Slower does not mean less capable

Choosing a sustainable pace can improve accuracy, communication and emotional regulation. It can also reveal where expectations are simply too high. The aim is not to move slowly all day; it is to be able to change pace intentionally.

Your Tune-In Toolkit

Five-area check-in

AREA	WHAT I NOTICE	WHAT I NEED
Body	_____	_____
Emotion	_____	_____
Thoughts	_____	_____
Sensory load	_____	_____
Capacity	_____	_____

My personal early-warning signs

- My body tells me: _____
- My behaviour changes by: _____
- My sensory tolerance changes by: _____
- My thinking starts to: _____
- The people close to me may notice: _____

Three levels of capacity

GREEN - enough capacity: continue, while protecting the habits that keep you steady.

AMBER - pressure building: slow the pace, reduce demands, add support and make fewer decisions.

RED - at or beyond capacity: prioritise safety and essentials; postpone non-essential demands and bring in help.

Seven-day slowing-down experiment

- **Day 1:** pause once before answering a request.
- **Day 2:** do a body check between two tasks.
- **Day 3:** notice one sensory factor affecting you.
- **Day 4:** deliberately leave five minutes of transition time.
- **Day 5:** ask what a coping urge is trying to provide.
- **Day 6:** reduce one unnecessary demand.
- **Day 7:** review what you noticed only because you slowed down.

Weekly reflection

- When did I move faster than my capacity?
- What did I notice early enough to respond to?
- What need was easiest to miss?
- Where did slowing down improve a decision or conversation?
- What external pressure needs addressing?
- What support would help me maintain a sustainable pace?
- What do I want to notice sooner next week?

When slowing down feels unsafe

For some people, quiet or internal focus can bring trauma memories, panic or dissociation closer. You do not need to force prolonged mindfulness. Keep the pause short, orient to the external environment and use trauma-informed professional support if internal attention repeatedly becomes overwhelming.

When to seek additional help

Seek appropriate professional support when distress is persistent or worsening, daily functioning is significantly affected, coping behaviours are becoming harmful, or you experience frequent shutdown, dissociation, self-harm or suicidal thoughts. In an emergency in the UK, call 999 or attend A&E; NHS 111 and local urgent mental-health services can also direct you.

A Message From Maggie, Books & Resources

A message from Maggie

Slowing down can feel uncomfortable when you are used to getting through life by keeping going. Sometimes speed has been how you cope. If you stop, you may notice tiredness, sadness, anger, pain or simply how much you have been carrying.

I do not want 'slow down' to become another instruction you have to get right. Think of it as making enough room to hear yourself. You might discover that you need food, quiet, movement, reassurance, a boundary or help. You might also discover that you are okay and ready to carry on.

The important part is that the next step becomes a choice rather than something you tumble into because the day is moving too fast.

Your needs do not become more valid only when they are urgent. Tuning in earlier gives you a chance to respond before you reach empty.

Recommended reading

Carl R. Rogers - *On Becoming a Person*. Foundational person-centred writing on acceptance, congruence and growth.

Russ Harris - *The Happiness Trap*. ACT-informed tools for noticing internal experiences and choosing meaningful action.

Kristin Neff - *Self-Compassion*. Practical exploration of responding to difficulty without unnecessary self-criticism.

Deb Dana - *Anchored*. Accessible nervous-system-informed material on recognising states and cues of safety.

Further resources & clinical notes

Support may include your GP, NHS mental-health services, a qualified counsellor or psychotherapist, neurodivergent-affirming support, occupational health, workplace reasonable adjustments and specialist services where relevant. Coaching can support awareness and practical change but does not replace clinical treatment.

Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On Becoming a Person*. • Harris, R. (2019). *The Happiness Trap*, 2nd ed. • Neff, K. (2011). *Self-Compassion*. • Dana, D. (2021). *Anchored*. • Relevant NICE guidance should be consulted alongside individual clinical assessment where appropriate.

Important: This resource provides coaching reflection and psychoeducation. It does not diagnose a condition or replace individual medical, psychological or emergency care.

Space to Breathe Therapy - Maggie's Coaching