Fact Sheet: Autonomic Nervous System, ADHD, and Burnout

The **autonomic nervous system (ANS)** is the part of your nervous system that controls involuntary functions—things like heart rate, digestion, breathing, and stress responses. It operates without you having to think about it, regulating your **fight-or-flight** (sympathetic) and **rest-and-digest** (parasympathetic) responses.

How the ANS Relates to ADHD and Burnout

ADHD women tend to have **dysregulation in their autonomic nervous system**, which means their bodies struggle to balance between **high alert (stress) and relaxation (recovery).** This makes them more vulnerable to burnout because:

Frequent Sympathetic Activation (Fight-or-Flight)

ADHD brains are often in a **state of hyperarousal** due to chronic stress, executive dysfunction, and emotional sensitivity (e.g., Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria).

Weakened Parasympathetic Activation (Rest-and-Digest)

ADHD brains often struggle with **resting and recovering**, making it harder to regulate energy and emotions.

Nervous System Exhaustion in Burnout

When the ANS is **constantly overactivated**, the body eventually **shuts down**, leading to fatigue, emotional numbness, and difficulty functioning.

Frequent Sympathetic Activation (Fight-or-Flight)

ADHD brains are often in a **state of hyperarousal** due to chronic stress, executive dysfunction, and emotional sensitivity (e.g., Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria).

Difficulty switching **off** high-alert mode can lead to overwhelm, exhaustion, and burnout.

Weakened Parasympathetic Activation (Rest-and-Digest)

ADHD brains often struggle with **resting and recovering**, making it harder to regulate energy and emotions.

Sleep issues, sensory overload, and difficulty with relaxation **prevent proper nervous system recovery** from stressors.

Nervous System Exhaustion in Burnout

When the ANS is **constantly overactivated**, the body eventually **shuts down**, leading to **fatigue, emotional numbness, and difficulty functioning.**

This is why burnout in ADHD often feels like a **crash**—the body and brain are simply too overwhelmed to keep going.

Managing ADHD Burnout Through Nervous System Regulation

To recover from burnout, ADHD women often need to **intentionally regulate their nervous systems.** Some strategies include:

Sensory Regulation

Engaging in sensory activities (weighted blankets, fidget tools, nature, art, music) to downshift stress.

Breathwork & Movement

Deep breathing, yoga, or light stretching to engage the parasympathetic system.

Externalized Executive Functioning

Using timers, body scans, and structured downtime to avoid overworking.

Social Co-Regulation

Connecting with safe, affirming people who help regulate emotions.

Reducing Hyperarousal Triggers

Limiting overstimulation (social media, notifications, caffeine) to prevent nervous system overload.

Sensory Regulation and Breathwork

Sensory Regulation: Engaging in sensory activities (weighted blankets, fidget tools, nature, art, music) to downshift stress.

Breathwork & Movement: Deep breathing, yoga, or light stretching to engage the parasympathetic system.

Understanding ANS and ADHD Burnout

Understanding how the **autonomic nervous system** functions can help ADHD women take burnout seriously; it's about nervous system recovery.

