



Post-Traumatic Stress & Nervous System Responses

Understanding how trauma keeps the nervous system in defensive mode

The Nervous System Remembers

After trauma, physical injuries heal but the nervous system can remain activated, interpreting normal sensations as threats. This isn't weakness or imagination - it's a biological response to experiencing helplessness and loss of control. The system learned that danger comes without warning, so it stays on high alert.

Why Victims Hurt More Than Those at Fault

Research consistently shows that people not at fault in motor vehicle accidents have worse outcomes than those who caused the collision, despite similar impact forces. The difference isn't physical - it's in perceived control. When you couldn't prevent what happened, the nervous system learns the world is unpredictable and dangerous.

Common Nervous System Responses After Trauma

- Hypervigilance - scanning for threats, difficulty relaxing, startling easily
- Avoidance - of driving, specific roads, or activities that trigger memories
- Sleep disturbance - trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or nightmares
- Pain amplification - normal sensations interpreted as dangerous
- Mood changes - irritability, anxiety, depression, emotional numbness

The Hidden Cost of the Claims Process

Outcomes worsen when compensation or legal claims are involved. The problem isn't lawyers - it's the system itself: slow pace, conflicting assessments, and constant re-traumatization through depositions and examinations. This sustained stress prevents nervous system recovery even as physical tissues heal.

Practical Steps for Nervous System Regulation

- Consistent sleep schedule - helps recalibrate threat detection
- Graded exposure to avoided situations - rebuilds sense of safety
- Regular physical activity - discharges defensive activation
- Social connection - counteracts isolation and hypervigilance
- Professional trauma-informed care - when self-management isn't enough

Why This Matters

Post-traumatic stress responses aren't character flaws - they're nervous system adaptations to overwhelming experiences. Addressing them directly, alongside physical treatment, leads to more complete recovery.