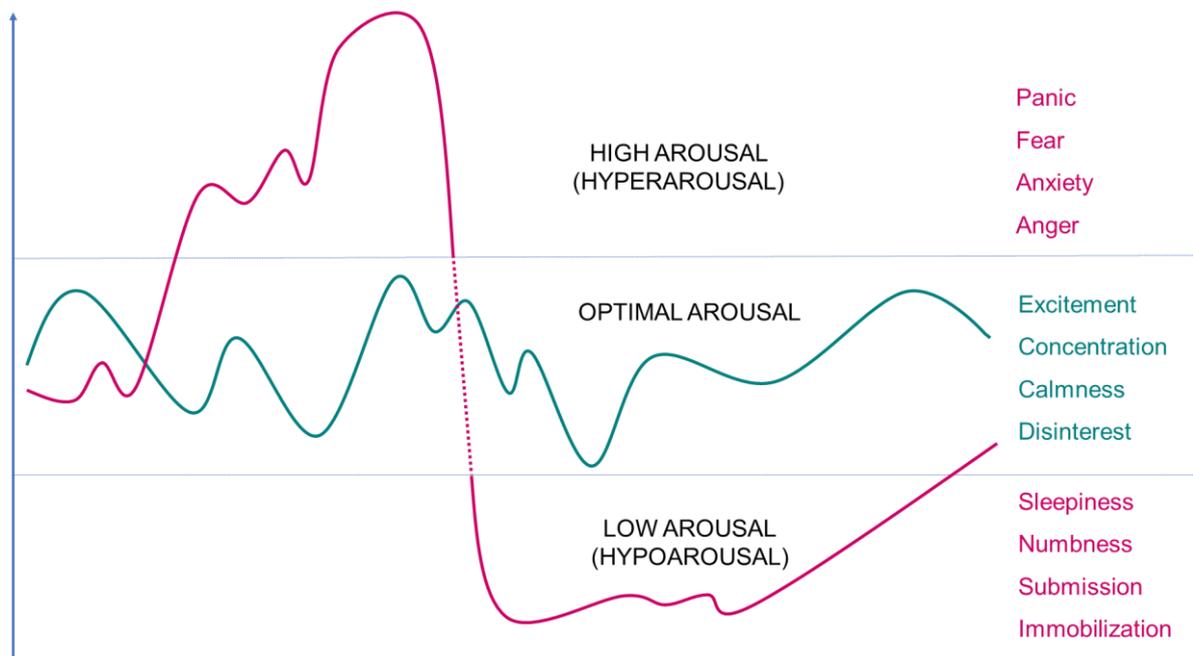


## STATE OF AROUSAL

Arousal means a person's level of alertness and vigilance. The skill to recognize and regulate your state of arousal enhances the wellbeing of both your mind and body. Arousal usually fluctuates during the day. Many different factors influence your arousal state, such as the quantity and quality of sleep, emotions, the amount of daylight, and the time of day. For example, after a night of poor sleep, your arousal can be very low in the afternoon. Then again, when you get excited about something, or when you are nervous about something, your arousal goes up higher than when you are doing usual things. When your arousal state is balanced, not too high or too low, you are in a state of optimal arousal. Optimal arousal supports learning new things, focusing on the present moment, and maintaining a good functional ability.

Stress makes arousal go up. When stress continues for long and is intense, the arousal state is constantly high. Then it is hard for a person to calm down, or to relax and return to a state of optimal arousal. Difficult past experiences can cause traumatic stress and affect a person's feeling of safety. This often makes it hard for the person to maintain a state of optimal arousal. The arousal state can fluctuate quickly between high arousal and low arousal. Or, the arousal state can be constantly high. So, there is a strong connection between the feeling of safety, and arousal. When a person is scared, arousal goes up high. Then again, an extreme threat can lead to a state of low arousal, where a person shuts down and gets immobilized. In the state of optimal arousal, a person usually feels safe.

The figure below depicts different arousal states, and feelings that go together with them. The green line represents the usual fluctuation of arousal during the day. As you see, arousal can go from excitement to disinterest also within the zone of optimal arousal. The red line represents the fast and uncontrollable fluctuation of the arousal state of a person suffering from traumatic stress when something brings a difficult experience back to their mind during an ordinary day.



### How can I recognize my arousal state?

You can learn to recognize your arousal state. Below, there is a list of signals connected to high arousal, low arousal, and optimal arousal. You might not recognize all the signals in yourself, but you can learn to recognize your arousal state with the help of the list below.

<b><u>High arousal (hyperarousal)</u></b>	<b><u>Optimal arousal</u></b>	<b><u>Low arousal (hypoarousal)</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fast heart rate</li><li>• Fast breathing</li><li>• Sweating</li><li>• Pale, cold skin</li><li>• Feeling nervous, restless</li><li>• Shaking</li><li>• Muscle tension</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Calm heart rate</li><li>• Calm, regular breathing</li><li>• Feeling present, balanced</li><li>• Easy to move, easy to stay in one place</li><li>• Concentrating is successful</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Slow heart rate</li><li>• Slow, “invisible” breathing</li><li>• Flushed, warm skin</li><li>• Tingling and numbness</li><li>• Feeling absent, shut down</li><li>• Powerlessness, immobilization, difficulty to move</li></ul>

### How can I regulate my arousal?

You can learn to balance your arousal state. A regular daily rhythm and a sufficient amount of sleep help to stay in a state of optimal arousal. When a person is tired, they are often in a state of low arousal. Then again, for example, constant hurry and an irregular daily rhythm can easily take a person to a state of high arousal. Spending time with close and safe persons helps to stay in the state of optimal arousal. Also, any physical exercise that you enjoy helps to balance your arousal state. Below, there is a list of activities that you can try for regulating your arousal, when you recognize that you are in a state of high or low arousal.

<b><u>If you are in a state of high arousal</u></b>	<b><u>If you are in a state of low arousal</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Breathe out with long exhales</li><li>• Press your soles against the floor/ground, and feel the floor/ground under your feet</li><li>• Focus your attention on the surroundings: five things that you see, you hear, and you feel in the surrounding environment</li><li>• Try a weighted blanket or other weighted products</li><li>• Butterfly tapping: cross your arms against your chest and tap your chest calmly, alternating with each palm</li><li>• Wash your face with ice-cold water for 30 seconds</li><li>• Tense and relax different parts of your body (muscle groups) alternately</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stand up, move your arms and your feet, stomp, jump</li><li>• Push the wall with both your hands as hard as you can</li><li>• Place your palms together and push them against each other</li><li>• Focus your attention on the surroundings: five things that you see, you hear, and you feel in the surrounding environment</li><li>• Eat something that has a strong flavor, for example, a cough drop</li><li>• Tap all over your body</li><li>• Press your soles against the floor/ground and feel the floor/ground under your feet</li></ul>