

# Parasympathetic nervous system

The parasympathetic [nervous system](#) (abbreviated PN to avoid confusion with the peripheral nervous system (PNS)) is one of the two divisions of the autonomic nervous system, the other being the sympathetic nervous system.

The autonomic nervous system is responsible for regulating the body's unconscious actions. The parasympathetic system is responsible for stimulation of “rest-and-digest” or “feed and breed” activities that occur when the body is at rest, especially after eating, including sexual arousal, salivation, lacrimation (tears), urination, digestion and defecation. Its action is described as being complementary to that of the sympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for stimulating activities associated with the fight-or-flight response.

Nerve fibres of the parasympathetic nervous system arise from the central nervous system. Specific nerves include several cranial nerves, specifically the oculomotor nerve, facial nerve, glossopharyngeal nerve, and vagus nerve. Three spinal nerves in the sacrum (S2-4) also act as parasympathetic nerves. These are commonly referred to as the pelvic splanchnic nerves.

Because of its location, the parasympathetic system is commonly referred to as having “craniosacral outflow”, which stands in contrast to the sympathetic nervous system, which is said to have “thoracolumbar outflow”.

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