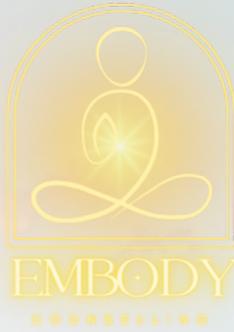


FREE EBOOK

TRAUMA, CHRONIC
ILLNESS AND
AUTOIMMUNITY:

MAKING SENSE OF
THE OVERLAP

Created with love by Lucy Hampson
www.embody-counselling.com.au



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1. TRAUMA AND THE BODY
2. THE PHYSIOLOGY OF TRAUMA
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This e-book is a personal story of my journey from living with chronic illness. Within these pages, I share everything I've learned about the relationship between trauma and chronic illness, drawing from my own experiences and professional insights.

My hope is that by sharing what supported me, you'll find something that feels useful for your own journey.

I hope these reflections give you a sense of companionship and a few ideas to explore in your own time.

Please note, this e-book is not intended to replace medical advice or the treatments that are already working for you. Instead, it's meant to complement your existing care. I myself continue to take medication and pursue medical interventions alongside the practices I share here.

Each journey is different and unique. Feel free to take what resonates and leave what doesn't.

Lucy xxx

TRAUMA & THE BODY



If you're reading this, you may be living with chronic body symptoms or an autoimmune condition and are searching for answers or support.

I understand this space, because I have lived experience myself.

In 2019, I was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis, a debilitating autoimmune disease of the large intestine.

Overnight, I began experiencing symptoms that changed my life in ways I couldn't have imagined. It felt frightening and unfair, and I found myself searching everywhere for answers, willing to try almost anything.

What I stepped into was a minefield of information and uncertainty. My doctors couldn't explain why this was happening, and nothing seemed to bring relief. I felt lost and isolated, unsure of how to make sense of what my body was going through.

THOSE EARLY EXPERIENCES SHOWED ME HOW VALUABLE GENTLE, CLEAR SUPPORT CAN BE, AND THAT'S WHAT INSPIRED ME TO CREATE THIS FREE E-BOOK FOR YOU.

I want you to know that support is possible, and things can feel different over time. By sharing my own experiences, my hope is to offer some grounding and companionship as you navigate your own path.

xxxx

When the body speaks

The first time my body really signalled distress, I didn't fully understand what was happening. Over time, I realised I was living under chronic stress and not really living a life that felt meaningful or aligned with what I wanted. It was during psychotherapy that the connections became clearer. I started to understand how much unresolved anxiety and past stress I was holding in my body, especially in my gut. This made me see firsthand how emotional and psychological stress can show up as physical symptoms.

"IN THE MOST HEALTH-OBSSESSED SOCIETY EVER, ALL IS NOT WELL"

GABOR MATE.

Body symptoms can take many forms, from fibromyalgia and autoimmune conditions to skin issues or cancer. Autoimmune diseases alone are estimated to affect around 5–10% of the global population, and rates appear to be rising, particularly among women.

These symptoms are signals from the body that something needs attention. Understanding them, and how they relate to stress and past trauma, can be a crucial part of living with chronic illness.

Research shows that chronic stress can drive persistent inflammation in the body, and trauma often manifests in physical symptoms rather than as classic PTSD.

This is where the concept of psychosomatic comes in, the connection between mind (psyche) and body (soma), particularly when emotional or psychological factors influence physical health.

My own journey helped me see just how powerful this mind-body connection can be, and how tuning into it may provide insight and guidance for navigating chronic illness.

xoxo

Trauma...me?

*I couldn't recognise trauma because
I didn't understand what it was.*

At first, I couldn't recognise trauma in my own life. I thought trauma only happened in extreme events, a natural disaster, war, assault, or a serious accident.

Then I learned something that surprised me, trauma isn't just about the event itself, although it may happen around one or a series of events. It's about how the body and mind experience, process, and respond to overwhelming stress.

Even though I had a good childhood and was well cared for, fed, and sheltered, I started to notice relational patterns I had carried for years, ways my responses had been conditioned and stress stored from early experiences. Gradually, it started to make sense why certain tension and discomfort appeared as symptoms in my body decades later.

Autoimmune conditions and chronic illness are incredibly complex. They rarely have a single cause and are often influenced by multiple factors, especially in people who are more sensitive or carry stress deeply. While there are no simple answers, recognising these patterns and understanding how trauma and stress affect the body can provide insight, support and new pathways forward.

**TRAUMA IS NOT THE EVENT, ALTHOUGH IT MAY OCCUR
AROUND AN EVENT.**

xoxo

What is trauma?

Trauma is an experience of **overwhelm**.

TRAUMA IS A FELT EXPERIENCE OF OVERWHELM IN THE BODY.

It's the way a combination of internal and external factors is **felt** and processed in the body.

Trauma is not defined by a single event, although it may occur around one.

- ▶ **Trauma can arise from anything that makes you feel overwhelmed or unable to cope, whether as a one-time experience or a series of events.**
- ▶ **What feels traumatic for one person might not feel traumatic for another. For one person, it could be a natural disaster or the loss of a loved one; for another, it might be experiences from childhood or the accumulation of stress over time.**
- ▶ **The degree to which an experience becomes traumatic also depends on a person's ability to co-regulate and receive compassion and non-judgement from a safe, supportive person.**

xoxo

Then I found out something else that surprised me even more!

WHEN TRAUMA ISN'T FULLY PROCESSED, IT CAN BE STORED IN THE BODY, EMBEDDED IN OUR FASCIA AND TISSUES.

The trauma-disease connection refers to how unresolved trauma can show up as physical symptoms in the body.

Trauma can look different for different people, for some, it might appear as PTSD, and for others, it may show up as an illness or other body symptoms.



UNDERSTANDING THIS CONNECTION HELPED ME MAKE SENSE OF HOW PAST EXPERIENCES COULD INFLUENCE MY HEALTH AND GAVE ME A FRAMEWORK FOR NOTICING, EXPLORING, AND WORKING WITH THESE PATTERNS IN MY OWN BODY.

For me, attachment trauma showed up as anxiety and tension in my gut whenever I feared being abandoned. I often went against my gut feelings, saying “yes” when I wanted to say “no,” and falling into people-pleasing patterns.

Over time, I began changing these habits. Noticing when I was stressed, practising mindful body awareness, and tuning into my authentic needs helped me understand what a real “yes” or “no” felt like and start setting boundaries.

Becoming aware of these patterns and listening to my body has been an important part of understanding myself and my health. It's an ongoing daily practice, sometimes easier, sometimes harder, and one I continue to humanise and work on.

THE PHYSIOLOGY OF TRAUMA

Trauma doesn't just live in our memories or emotions it also has a profound impact on the body. When we experience overwhelm, our nervous system reacts, and this response can leave lasting imprints on our physiology. Understanding these patterns can help explain why trauma affects sleep, digestion, energy levels, immune function, and even chronic illness.

Trauma theory is incredibly complex, and what follows is my best attempt at explaining it in an accessible way.

For trauma to occur in the body **two** things typically happen:

STRESS RESPONSE ACTIVATED + DORSAL VAGAL SHUTDOWN

1. The fight/flight response is activated.

- ▶ The autonomic nervous system responds to a threat, real or perceived, by mobilising the body for action.

Think of this as the car accelerator, revving the body to respond to danger.

On its own, this stress response doesn't create trauma.

2. Dorsal vagal shutdown (the freeze response)

- ▶ When the body can no longer cope with overwhelm, it shifts into dorsal vagal shutdown, a protective freeze response.

Imagine the car suddenly slamming on the brakes, collapsing the body into immobility to protect against extreme fear or pain.

This is similar to how prey animals "play dead" to survive.

xoxo

THE FREEZE RESPONSE IS CENTRAL TO HOW TRAUMA IS STORED IN THE BODY. WITHOUT THIS FREEZE, THE STRESS RESPONSE ALONE DOES NOT CREATE TRAUMA.

OVERALL, TRAUMA IS EXPERIENCED AS A FEELING OF FEAR, OVERWHELM, AND HELPLESSNESS, A STATE WHERE THE BODY AND MIND ARE UNABLE TO PROCESS OR RESOLVE THE THREAT AT THE TIME IT OCCURS.

We remain traumatised when the body can't integrate what happened or "shake off" the adrenaline that was activated during the fight-or-flight response. When the body goes into freeze and becomes immobilised, this energy can stay locked inside.

In the wild, animals naturally release this trapped energy through shaking, trembling, deep breathing, and other movements that help the nervous system return to balance.

xoxo

Trauma and autoimmune link

When the body stays in a persistent freeze response, it can contribute to patterns that may be linked with chronic body symptoms and autoimmunity.

For many people with chronic illness, the nervous system spends more time in this shutdown state than in the "stress" response.

Autoimmunity is often discussed in relation to this freeze state, and conditions like chronic pain, chronic fatigue, and fibromyalgia are also understood to have connections to long-term nervous system overwhelm.

**INTEGRATING UNRESOLVED TRAUMA DOESN'T
GUARANTEE SYMPTOM CHANGES, BUT FOR SOME
PEOPLE IT CAN BRING SHIFTS IN HOW THE BODY FEELS,
FUNCTIONS, OR RESPONDS.**

**EXPLORING THESE PATTERNS CAN OFFER INSIGHT AND
SUPPORT, BUT EVERYONE'S EXPERIENCE IS UNIQUE,
AND THERE'S NO SINGLE PATH OR OUTCOME.**

xoxo

Symptoms of trauma

GENERAL

Overwhelm, low energy, burnout, low stress capacity, depression, anxiety, hypervigilance, feeling 'stuck', nightmares, flashbacks, easily startled, disassociation.

BODY

Autoimmunity, gastrointestinal symptoms, fatigue, chronic pain, fibromyalgia, heaviness, insomnia, nausea.

FEELINGS

Helpless, powerless, unworthy, hopeless, guilt, shame, angry, numb, grief, exhaustion, confusion.

REALTIONSHIPS

Pushing people away, avoiding conflict, clinging to people, emotionally distancing.

COPING STRATEGIES

Addiction, substance abuse, procrastination, emotional eating, numbing behaviours, binge phone scrolling.

xoxo

BUILDING FELT SUPPORT

Journeing back to safety



To move through trauma, the body needs **safety, support** and **expansion**.

HEALING IS DEEPLY ROOTED IN THE EXPERIENCE OF FELT COMPASSION, WHICH PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE IN THE RECOVERY PROCESS. BEING WITNESSED, BELIEVED, AND NOT JUDGED CAN EASE SHAME AND CREATE SPACE FOR THE BODY TO SOFTEN.

Support and expansion help the nervous system shift out of shutdown at a pace that feels manageable.

Over time, with care and connection, the body can experience moments of greater steadiness. This is the ventral vagal state, a sense of balance, presence, and connection.

There's no rush or finish line, just small steps that help the system feel a little safer inside itself.

xoxo

Journeying back to safety

***TRAUMA TENDS TO FOLLOW A PREDICTABLE
PHYSIOLOGICAL PATHWAY, EVEN THOUGH EACH
PERSON'S LIFE EXPERIENCE IS UNIQUE AND ANYTHING
BUT PREDICTABLE.***

From a state of safety, a trigger initiates a fight-or-flight response.

If the threat cannot be escaped or confronted, the body shifts into dorsal vagal shutdown, commonly known as the freeze response.

For the body to recover, it needs to retrace this path, moving back through the activation it couldn't complete at the time.

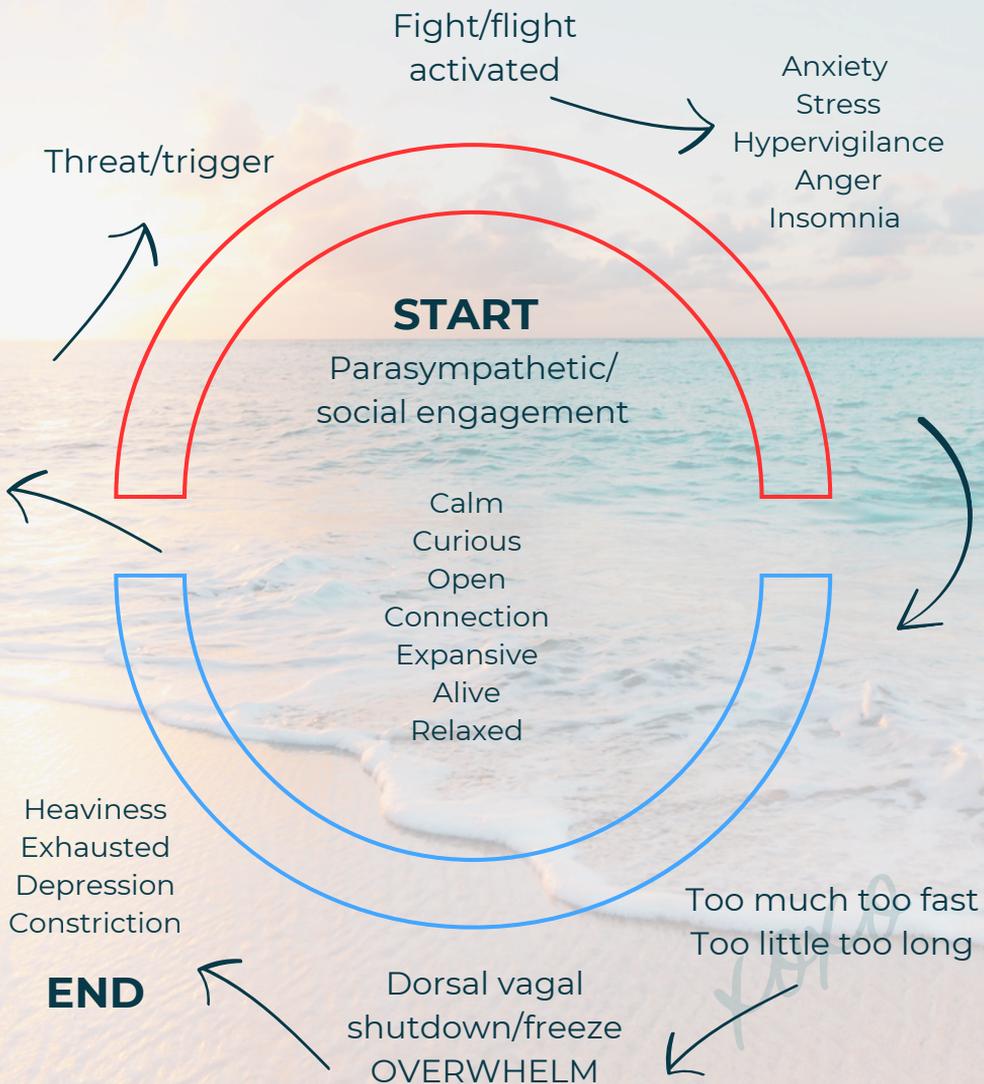
This can feel intense, which is why some people remain in shutdown without the right support or somatic tools.

This is the heart of trauma work, gently helping the body move through these states with enough safety, resources, and connection to make the process tolerable.

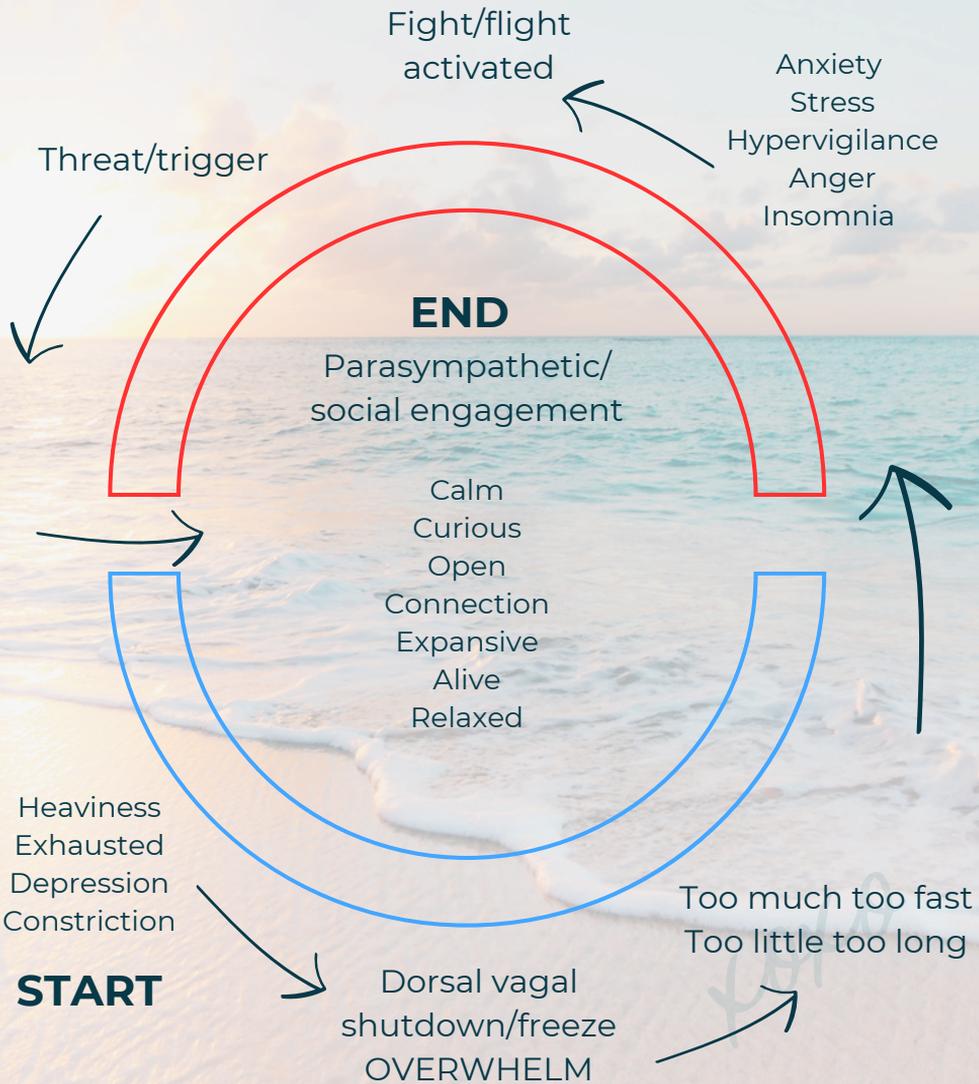
There's no pressure or timeline just a gradual return to more steadiness and a sense of safety inside yourself.

xoxo

Model of trauma Response



TO MOVE OUT OF TRAUMA WE FOLLOW THE SAME SEQUENCE IN REVERSE



Beyond words

Talk therapy can be incredibly helpful for understanding emotions and making meaning, but it has limitations when it comes to trauma.

Trauma is first and foremost a felt experience that lives in the body and nervous system, not just in thoughts or memories.

Because traditional talk therapy focuses on thinking, insight, and language, it doesn't always reach the deeper physiological layers where trauma patterns are held. The body often responds long before the mind can make sense of what's happening.

WE NEED TO FEEL SAFE IN OUR BODIES BEFORE WE CAN FULLY PROCESS TRAUMA ON A COGNITIVE LEVEL.

This is why recovery often requires body-based, bottom-up approaches. These practices help reconnect with physical sensations, gently release tension held in the tissues, and support the nervous system in finding steadier ground.

xoxo

Listening to the body

Despite taking medication, I found myself stuck in a cycle of flare-ups, and life felt incredibly hard. I had a sense that my illness wasn't only biological and that something deeper was being missed.

That's when I came across health psychology and eventually found a therapist who worked in this space.

LEARNING TO LISTEN TO MY BODY DIDN'T "FIX" EVERYTHING, BUT IT DID CHANGE HOW I RELATED TO MY SYMPTOMS AND TO MYSELF. IT HELPED ME UNDERSTAND MY STRESS PATTERNS, SOFTEN SOME OF THE TENSION I'D BEEN CARRYING FOR YEARS, AND APPROACH MY HEALTH AND FEAR WITH MORE COMPASSION AND CURIOSITY.

Therapy offered a safe, steady space to explore what had been sitting beneath the surface. Gently, I became more aware of old patterns and stress held in my body, and I began to integrate experiences I hadn't realised were shaping my health. This supported me in moving toward a life that feels more grounded, authentic, and aligned even while still managing a chronic condition.

*"Learn to read symptoms not only as problems to be overcome but as messages to be heeded."
Gabor Mate.*

xoxo

SHAPING A PATH FORWARD

Shared struggles



If you're living with a chronic illness, you already know the story doesn't always follow a neat arc.

For me, it certainly didn't end there. For some people, symptoms settle, and that's wonderful and for many of us, the journey continues. We move through periods of feeling well and periods of flare-ups, often influenced by life circumstances, stress levels, relationships, and sometimes factors that don't seem to make sense at all.

Even though I now have longer periods of feeling well, flares can still happen and when they do, they can be hard. I still take medication, and I incorporate a range of practices into my life that help me stay steadier.

Over time, I've noticed my symptoms tend to follow a pattern of stress, so I aim to create a life that feels calm and grounded, surrounded by people who are peaceful and supportive to be around.

Part of my ongoing work is widening my window of tolerance learning to sit with discomfort, building resilience, and finding ways to meet everyday challenges and relational stress with more steadiness. It's not about getting it perfect; it's about supporting my body and nervous system so I can move through life with a little more ease.

xoxo

As I reflect on my own journey and the patterns I've noticed in my body, mind, and responses to stress, certain behaviors became clear to me as significant in how I manage my health.

Many of these patterns align with the work of Gabor Maté, whose insights into trauma, stress, and chronic illness have helped me understand the wider context of these responses.

Working with these patterns extensively in therapy has allowed me to notice how my body and nervous system respond and guided the ways I care for myself.

These are four behaviors outlined by Gabor Maté that I recognised in myself and that are frequently associated with people living with chronic illness:

1. Repressing healthy expressions of anger

Many of us especially women are taught that anger is a negative emotion to be avoided or suppressed. But anger, when expressed healthily, can be a powerful force for setting boundaries and reclaiming personal power. Chronic repression of this emotion can lead to internal stress and affect our health.

2. Struggling to say NO and establish healthy boundaries

Feeling the need to be agreeable and accommodating often leads to sacrificing our own authentic needs. Over time, this can cause emotional and physical exhaustion, contributing to chronic stress and illness.

3. Prioritising others' needs over your own

Caregiving and putting others first can become second nature, especially when we derive value from helping others. But neglecting our own needs in the process creates an imbalance that can take a toll on our health.

4. Engaging in activities out of obligation rather than desire

Often, we find ourselves saying "yes" out of a sense of duty or guilt, doing things that don't align with our true desires. This misalignment can generate inner conflict and chronic stress, both of which exacerbate health conditions.

xoxo

Areas of support

This work isn't about fixing yourself or eliminating symptoms. It's about developing a more supportive relationship with your body, your needs, and the ways you respond to stress and challenge.

If you've recognised some of the patterns that may be influencing your experience of chronic illness or autoimmunity, the next step isn't a cure or a destination. It's an ongoing process of noticing, reflecting, and gently experimenting with what supports you.

Below are some key areas that can offer insight, support, and greater capacity over time in ways that are personal, flexible, and unique to you.

- Learning to say no and becoming more comfortable with disappointing others
- Placing more attention on your own needs and desires
- Finding safe, non-harmful ways to express and release anger
- Cultivating self-compassion
- Becoming aware of the stories, beliefs, and judgements of the mind, and learning how to relate to them differently
- Developing greater self-awareness
- Working with inner critics rather than trying to silence them
- Reconnecting with your gut sensations, authentic feelings, and needs
- Making space for rest and stillness
- Exploring somatic tools that support nervous system regulation and a felt sense of safety
- Gently working with attachment wounds and relational patterns
- Practising radical self-acceptance
- Learning to set healthy boundaries and express yourself more honestly
- Supporting the gut-brain connection
- Creating supportive rhythms around sleep, nourishment, movement, routine, and community

Not all of these will be relevant for everyone. You're invited to take what feels supportive and leave the rest.

Handwritten signature

This work can feel overwhelming at times, and there's no expectation to change everything at once. These areas are deeply interconnected, and even small shifts can support your capacity to meet life with more steadiness. There's no timeline or endpoint just an ongoing process of noticing, adjusting, and responding with care.

I continue to live with and manage a chronic health condition, including taking medication. What has made the most difference for me is integrating the practices I've shared and learning to relate to my body and inner world in a more supportive way. My symptoms have shifted over time, but what I value most is the sense of emotional freedom, self-trust, and alignment I've gained regardless of what my body is doing on any given day.

Healing is complex, personal, and rarely linear. I can't promise changes in symptoms, and I don't believe that's the measure of success. What I do see, in myself and in the people I work with, is that engaging with trauma gently and consistently can support greater emotional balance, clearer boundaries, more authentic relationships, and a stronger connection to self. Any changes in physical symptoms are individual and cannot be guaranteed.

If you choose to continue this work, you don't have to do it alone. Support, care, and compassionate guidance can make the process feel safer and more resourced, whatever path your body takes.

***I LEARNT THAT IF I DON'T SAY NO, MY BODY WILL SAY
NO FOR ME THROUGH SYMPTOMS.***

xoxo

Where to from here?

Living with chronic illness or autoimmunity can feel isolating and confusing at times. If parts of this ebook resonated with you, it may be because you're already aware that your experience is shaped by more than just physical symptoms.

My work is grounded in supporting people to gently explore how stress, trauma, and long-held patterns can influence the nervous system and the body. I take a holistic, body-centred approach that honours complexity and avoids quick fixes or rigid ideas of healing.

In therapy, we may explore the relationship between trauma and illness, stress awareness, self-compassion, and the signals your body communicates always at a pace that feels safe and respectful. The focus isn't on changing you, but on creating space to understand yourself more deeply and respond with care.

I aim to offer a steady, non-judgemental space where curiosity can replace self-blame, and where new awareness can emerge over time. This work looks different for everyone, and there's no expectation of outcomes or timelines.

If you feel drawn to this kind of support, you're welcome to reach out and see whether working together feels like the right fit for you. Whatever path you choose, you deserve care, understanding, and support as you navigate your own journey.

**HEALING TRAUMA IS A RESULT OF FEELING SAFE,
EMPOWERED AND SUPPORTED.**

xoxo



SCHEDULE A FREE 15 MINUTE CALL

Need more info? This can be a way for us to see whether we're a good fit. The therapeutic relationship is an important part of the work, and this gives you space to sense whether you feel comfortable with me and whether working together feels right for you.

"I HAD A FREE 15 MINUTE CALL WITH LUCY, AND SHE WAS SUPER FRIENDLY AND MADE ME FEEL AT EASE RIGHT AWAY. SHE ASSURED ME WE'D GO AT MY OWN PACE, AND I FELT COMPLETELY HEARD AND RESPECTED THROUGHOUT".



BOOK A SESSION

10% off of your first therapy session. Book a session with me [directly here](#).

"LUCY IS A UNIQUE AND INCREDIBLE HUMAN BEING! SHE CAN SUPPORT YOUR TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEY WITH A GENTLE AND HOLISTIC, YET POWERFUL TOUCH. WORKING WITH HER FEELS ORGANIC, PROFOUND, AND AUTHENTIC. I HIGHLY RECOMMEND STARTING A THERAPEUTIC PATH WITH LUCY AND TRYING THIS FANTASTIC EXPERIENCE".

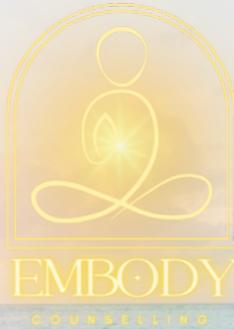


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Sign up to my newsletter to stay updated on all upcoming courses!

THANK YOU
FOR READING!



with love



*Lucy
xoxo*

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