GAS vs. BRAKE: Beneath the Surface

what your child's symptoms may be telling you

Same child. Very different symptoms.

One parent says, "She never sleeps well." Another says, "He melts down every day after school." A third says, "She has tummy aches all the time and eats about five foods."

Each of those usually lands with a different specialist and gets treated as its own problem. Sometimes it is. But we also see a lot of kids where the symptoms share something underneath: how their nervous system is regulating. This guide explains that layer in plain language.

01

Two modes, one nervous system

Think of your child's nervous system like a car. It has a gas pedal and a brake, and a healthy system moves between them all day: gas to get going, brake to settle, digest, learn, and sleep.

GAS

Fight-or-flight.
Alert, wired, reactive.

BRAKE

Rest-and-digest.
Calm, focused, ready to learn.

The problem is not having a gas pedal. It is a foot that stays on it. Many of the kids we scan are idling at high speed all day. Some kids look the opposite, flat, foggy, and slow to get going. In both cases the common thread is the same: the system has trouble shifting.

02

What a foot on the gas can look like

Because the nervous system runs the whole body, a stuck pedal does not always look “nervous.” It can show up in a lot of places:

Emotions & behavior	Big reactions to small things. Meltdowns after school. Clingy or anxious. Hard to calm once upset.
Focus & learning	Can’t sit through dinner. Homework takes forever. Forgets instructions. Seems to work twice as hard to keep up.
Sleep	Exhausted but wired at bedtime. Takes hours to fall asleep. Wakes often during the night.
Digestion & eating	Frequent tummy aches. Constipation. Reflux. Very picky eating.
Sensory	Startles easily. Overwhelmed by noise, crowds, tags, or textures. Hard to switch gears or handle change.

Every item on this list can also have other causes, and some need medical attention of their own. Please keep your pediatrician in the loop. What we add is one more question: how is this child’s nervous system regulating?

03

Why BRAKE matters so much

Digestion, deep sleep, and calm focus all depend on the brake. A body that cannot get there is like a car idling at high RPM. It keeps running, but it burns through fuel, and everything that needs the engine to settle gets harder.

That is why a child in this state is not “choosing” to ignore you, refuse dinner, or stay up. A brain in survival mode is busy scanning the room. It is not thinking about spelling words.

04

How a foot gets stuck

We group the stressors that load a young nervous system into what we call the Three T’s:

Traumas
PHYSICAL

Birth, falls, accidents, sports, long hours sitting.

Thoughts
EMOTIONAL

School pressure, family stress, big changes, worry.

Toxins
CHEMICAL

Diet, environmental exposures, repeated rounds of medication.

Often it is several of these stacked up early, such as a stressful pregnancy, a hard birth, colic, reflux, and ear infections. We call that the **Perfect Storm**.

None of this is anyone’s fault. A C-section or a course of antibiotics is sometimes exactly what a baby needs. The point is only that stress adds up, and a small system can get tuned to stay on alert.

05

What we actually do

We don’t diagnose or treat conditions.

We measure how your child’s nervous system is regulating. Then we use gentle, specific adjustments to help it shift out of GAS and into BRAKE.

How we measure. An INSiGHT scan is painless and quick. It looks at three things together:

- **Neurothermal:** skin temperature patterns along the spine, which reflect how the autonomic nervous system is behaving
- **sEMG:** muscle tension patterns along the spine
- **HRV (heart rate variability):** how flexibly the body shifts between GAS and BRAKE

How we help. Pediatric adjustments are gentle. Think light, specific pressure, not twisting or cracking. We re-scan along the way so you can see what is changing, and you tell us what you notice at home.

Alongside your child’s team. We work with your pediatrician, OT, tutor, and therapist, not instead of them. Please do not change or stop any medication or therapy without talking to the doctor who prescribed it.

06

Five ways to help the brake at home

These are not a treatment. They are ways to lower the load on a system that is already working hard.

1. **Keep a predictable rhythm**
   Same order for mornings and evenings. Predictability tells a nervous system it can stand down.
2. **Give a calm landing**
   After school or activities, offer a snack and 20 quiet minutes before questions or demands.
3. **Breathe out slowly together**
   Two minutes of slow breaths with a long exhale, like blowing out a candle. Do it with them.
4. **Get outside and move**
   Morning daylight and real play help set the body’s rhythm and burn off stored-up energy.
5. **Protect sleep**
   Consistent bedtime, dim lights, and screens away an hour before bed.

07

Is your child’s foot stuck on the gas?

Does your child…

- [ ] Has trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- [ ] Melts down after school or at the end of the day
- [ ] Struggles to focus, sit through meals, or finish homework
- [ ] Is easily startled or overwhelmed by noise, crowds, or textures
- [ ] Has frequent tummy aches, constipation, or very picky eating
- [ ] Has a hard time switching gears or handling change
- [ ] Seems either wired all the time or flat and hard to get going
- [ ] Had a stressful pregnancy, hard birth, colic, reflux, or lots of ear infections

If you checked more than a few, a scan can show you what is happening underneath.

The symptom is the surface. The nervous system is what is underneath.

The next step is a New Patient Experience, where we scan your child, walk you through what we see, and tell you honestly whether we can help.

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This guide is for education only. It is not medical advice and does not diagnose, treat, or cure any condition. Chiropractic care at our practice focuses on nervous system function. Please talk with your child’s pediatrician or prescribing doctor about any symptom, diagnosis, or medication.