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RELEASE, REBALANCE, RENEW

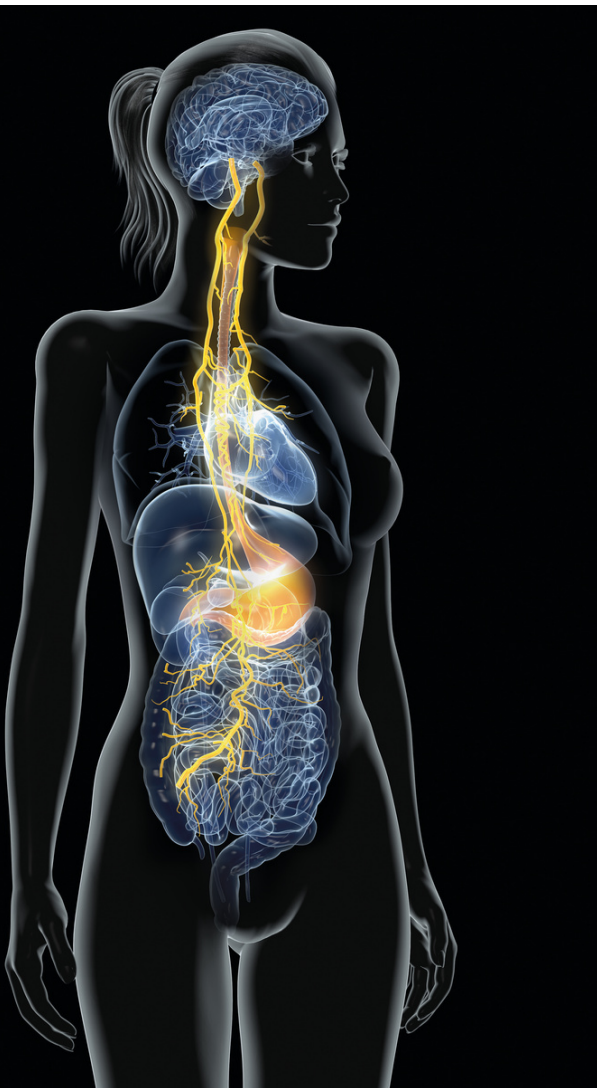


20 VAGUS NERVE STIMULATION TECHNIQUES

**Activate your Parasympathetic nervous system and
unlock the key to a calmer, healthier body system**

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The vagus nerve, often referred to as the "wandering nerve," plays a vital role in regulating a wide range of bodily functions, from digestion to heart rate. The vagus nerve is a part of the parasympathetic nervous system, and when the ventral ('front') vagus nerve is activated, it has the power to calm the mind, reduce stress, and promote relaxation, which has a knock on effect for cells and organs throughout the body, leading to improved mental and physical health. Below you'll find 20 evidence-based techniques that can help stimulate your vagus nerve and unlock its amazing potential.



Simple At Home Techniques:

1# Physiological Sigh

The physiological sigh is a simple yet powerful technique that can help activate the parasympathetic nervous system. To practise the physiological sigh, begin by taking a slow, deep breath in through your nose, allowing your abdomen to expand fully. Then take a final brief, extra inhale through the nose to expand collapsed alveoli in the lungs and get even more breath into the body. Then, release the breath slowly and fully through your mouth with a gentle sigh. Repeat this process several times, focusing on deep, intentional breaths.

2# Bhramari Bee Pranyama

Find a comfortable seated position, close your eyes, and take a deep breath. Exhale slowly while making a humming sound like a bee. This soothing technique calms the mind, reduces stress, and improves vagal tone, allowing you to release tension and embrace relaxation.

3# Cymba Concha ear massage:

Gently use your index fingers to make light pressure circles in the crevice of the outer ear, above the crease that is over the actual ear canal.

By stimulating this area (which is called the cymba concha), the ventral vagus nerve can be activated. Around 30 seconds on each side (or both sides together), accompanied by slow conscious breathing, when practised regularly, can really help to regulate your nervous system - and gradually reduce excess cortisol levels and shift your system from sympathetic dominance to a more appropriate balance.

4# Havening

In a safe and comfortable place, gently stroke your upper arms, from the shoulders down to the elbows, using your hands or fingertips. Focus on the sensation of touch and notice any changes in intensity or quality of any emotions you are experiencing.

Add mental distraction: While engaging in Havening touch, begin to distract yourself mentally. You can recite a comforting phrase, visualise a peaceful scene, or count backwards from 100 in increments of three. The goal is to shift your attention away from any distressing memory or emotion.

Repeat and release: Continue to engage in Havening touch and mental distraction for several minutes, allowing the intensity of any negative emotions to decrease. Notice any shifts in your emotional state and the sensations in your body. You may experience a sense of relief, calmness, or even a shift in perspective.

Havening triggers delta waves in the brain, promoting relaxation and reducing stress. It's like giving your mind a gentle massage, allowing you to let go of tension and find inner peace.



5# Butterfly Hug

The 'Butterfly Hug' ('Butterfly Tapping'), is a simple yet effective technique for calming the nervous system and stimulating the vagus nerve. To practise, sit or stand comfortably with your back straight.

Begin by crossing your arms in front of your chest, like you're giving yourself a self-hug, with your fingertips resting on your upper chest, just below your collarbone. Point your fingers more towards your neck than towards your arms.

Then, gently tap your fingertips alternately on your chest, one hand at a time, creating a rhythmic, butterfly-wing-like movement. As you tap, focus on taking slow belly breaths. The combination of tapping and controlled breathing helps activate the vagus nerve.

This technique can be particularly useful during moments of stress, anxiety, or when you simply need a quick way to rebalance and renew your nervous system.

Don't feel you have to move your hands in a specific rhythm; allow your body to make the frequency and intensity of movement that it needs at the time. Practise for a few minutes, whenever you feel the need

6# Box Breathing

Inhale deeply, through your nose, into your abdomen (rather than into your chest), for a count of four, hold the inhale for a count of four, exhale for a count of four, and then hold the exhale for a count of four. Repeat.

Box breathing calms the mind, enhances vagal tone, and empowers you to regain control over stressful situations

7# 4-7-8 Breathing

Another straightforward breathing practice that can activate the vagus nerve, is the 4-7-8 technique. In this practice, inhale for a count of 4, through your nose, hold the breath in, for a count of 7, then exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of 8. Repeat several times, Even just a couple of these breaths can instil a sense of calm, as the parasympathetic nervous system is activated.

8# Progressive Muscle Relaxation

In a comfortable, lying or seated position, starting with your toes, slowly tense and relax each muscle group in your body as you work your way up to the top of your head.

Progressive muscle relaxation activates the vagus nerve, reduces muscle tension, and induces a state of deep relaxation. By consciously releasing physical tension, you create space for emotional and mental calmness.



9# Slow Belly Breathing

Place one hand on your belly, inhale deeply through your nose, and feel your belly rise, as your lungs expand into the abdomen, rather than up into the chest. Exhale slowly through your mouth, allowing your belly to fall. Repeat, slowly, several times, then resume normal breathing. If you can slow your breath to seven breaths per minute, your parasympathetic nervous system and vagus nerve will be activated.

Deep belly breathing engages the diaphragm, stimulates the vagus nerve, and promotes relaxation. It's a simple yet effective technique to quickly shift your body and mind to a more tranquil state.

10# Gratitude

Shifting your focus to positive emotions, such as gratitude, has been shown to reduce stress and improve vagal tone. By practicing gratitude, you invite more joy and appreciation into your life, supporting your journey towards well-being.

Simple ways to practise gratitude regularly, are to acknowledge three things in your life that you are grateful for; either every morning and/or every bedtime, or to actually keep a Gratitude Journal, and write down what you're grateful for each day.

11# 'The Basic Exercise'

This exercise, created by vagus nerve expert, Stanley Rosenberg, is intended to stimulate the vagus nerve through the gentle movement of the eyes and the associated tension and release in the neck area. It can be done daily or as needed to promote relaxation, reduce stress, and support overall well-being. As with any exercise, listen to your body, and if you experience discomfort or pain, discontinue the exercise and consult with a healthcare professional.

Find a Comfortable Seated or Standing Position. Drop your shoulders and relax them. This helps create a more comfortable and relaxed posture for the exercise. Reach behind your neck with both hands and gently cup the base of your skull. Your fingers should be at the back of your neck, with your thumbs on one side and your other fingers on the opposite side.

Maintain a still and stable position for your head. Your focus will be on moving your eyes, not your head.

Start by looking to one side with your eyes only, while keeping your head and neck still. Hold your gaze in this direction for a few seconds. You should feel a gentle stretch or tension in the neck area.

Slowly return your eyes to the centre position, looking straight ahead.

Now, move your eyes to the opposite side while keeping your head still. Again, hold your gaze in this direction for a few seconds.

Bring your eyes back to the centre position, looking straight ahead.

Repeat this gentle eye movement from side to side for several cycles, allowing your eyes to relax as you move them.

After completing several cycles, relax your hands from behind your neck and sit quietly for a moment, allowing the effects of the exercise to settle in.

12# Cold Exposure ('Cold Therapy')

(If you suffer from a cardiac condition or a highly dysregulated nervous system, go extra gently with cold therapy. Listen to your body and never try and push a low-resourced system into overwhelm).

A cold shower (start with 30 seconds and increase as you're able, up to 5 minutes), ice packs applied to the chest or back of the neck (~build up to 10 minutes at a time), or simply splashing cold water on your face, can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, improve heart rate variability and positively impact health (boosts mitochondrial function, increasing cellular energy production).

This practice can also increase alertness and promote mental clarity.



13# VOO Breathing

Take a deep belly breath in, through your nose, then exhale while making a low-pitched ('fog-horn') 'VOO' sound. Described by the 'Father' of Somatic Therapy, Peter Levine, voo breathing activates the vagus nerve, lowers your heart rate and induces a state of deep relaxation. It's like giving yourself a gentle internal hug, allowing tension to melt away.

14# Humming

As simple as it sounds, close your mouth and hum, feeling the vibrations in your throat. This is a very simple gateway to increasing inner calm, via activation of the vagus nerve through the vocal cords.

15# Singing

With a similar beneficial effect to humming, singing your favourite songs, focusing on deep and controlled breaths (which engages the diaphragm), not only helps you connect to your emotions and express yourself freely (further enhancing the relaxation response), it's also an effective and enjoyable way of activating the ventral vagal system. N.B. Your singing doesn't have to be in tune in order to achieve these benefits.



16# Intermittent fasting

This is a powerful vagal nerve activator that should only be undertaken if you've no history of disordered eating, are not pregnant or a diabetic dependent on insulin. Pre-menopausal women should be careful with intermittent fasting pre-menstrually (*it's important to sync fasting practices you're your menstrual cycle*).

Restrict eating periods to specific time windows, such as 16 hours of fasting with an 8-hour eating window. Either on a daily or alternate day basis.

Intermittent fasting activates the vagus nerve, supporting digestive health, reducing inflammation, and promoting overall well-being. It's a powerful tool to reset your body and optimise its natural healing processes.

17# Laughter

Laughter stimulates the vagus nerve, releases endorphins, and reduces stress. It's a natural antidepressant that brings joy and lightness into your life, supporting your overall well-being. Watch a comedy film, engage in playful activities, find humour in everyday situations, or do whatever it is that makes you laugh authentically.

Additional Vagus Nerve Stimulation Strategies

18# Activated Oxygen Therapy

Shown to activate the parasympathetic state and improve heart rate variability, Activated Oxygen Therapy utilises filtered ambient room air, which undergoes an energising chemical reaction; similar to that in plants during photosynthesis, to generate a bio-identical signal to the body (inhaled through a nasal cannula). This bio-identical signal stimulates the vagus nerve, in addition to enhancing cell repair and regeneration, improving cellular energy production and increasing the anti-oxidant status.



19# Acupuncture

A qualified acupuncture practitioner can strategically place needles to stimulate specific points on your body, including points to activate the vagus nerve.

Acupuncture has also been shown to reduce pain, and harmonise the body's energy flow.

20# Aerobic Exercise

Moderate-intensity aerobic activities, such as jogging, brisk walking, swimming and cycling, have been shown to activate the vagus nerve. Exercise increases heart rate variability; a marker of vagal tone, which reflects the nerve's activity.

Each of these techniques offers you an opportunity to activate your vagus nerve, reduce stress, and promote health and relaxation. Consistency is key! Choose three of these techniques and practise them each daily for a few minutes (ideally spread throughout your day). Research suggests it can take several months of consistent practice to help a dysregulated system get back into balance, so be patient and persistent!

Stay empowered, stay hopeful, and embrace your journey towards an increasingly vibrant and fulfilling life.

Any questions or queries, please contact me, Dr Claire Bowen, via DrClaire@ActivatedOxygenTherapy.com, or on +44(0)796 783 0538. If you'd like a free discovery call about Optimum Health Coaching and Nervous System Regulation work, just let me know!

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