

# The Power and Practices for Activating the Vagus Nerve

Start activating your parasympathetic nervous system through stimulating the Vagus Nerve to TURN ON your body's ability to heal!

Our body has an “on/off” switch to activate our parasympathetic nervous system, known as the “Rest, Digest, Recover” system.

The vagus nerve is a sensory nerve that starts at the base of your brain and travels down both sides of your neck through your stomach and intestines, enervating your heart and lungs, and connecting your throat, neck, ears and all your facial muscles.

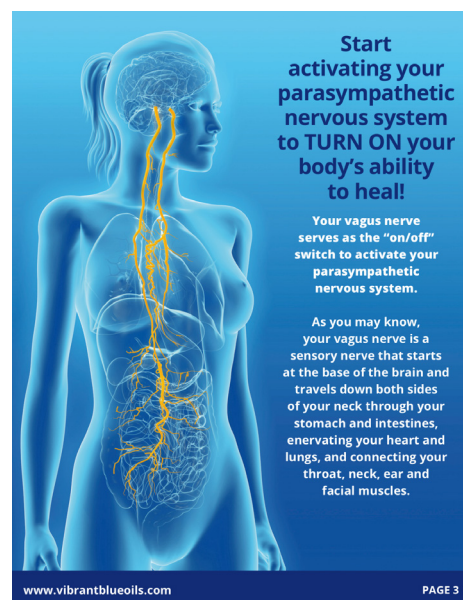
## VAGUS NERVE STIMULATION STRATEGIES

Your BODY NEEDS TO BE IN THE PARASYMPATHETIC STATE in order to HEAL.

- 1. Deep and Slow Breathing.** Breath is one of the fastest ways to influence your nervous system, especially deep breathing that activates both the lungs and the diaphragm. One way to do this is to Belly Breathe.

To Belly Breathe, your belly should expand, or go outward, when you breathe in. When you breathe out, your belly should cave in. The more your belly expands and the more it caves in, the deeper you're breathing.

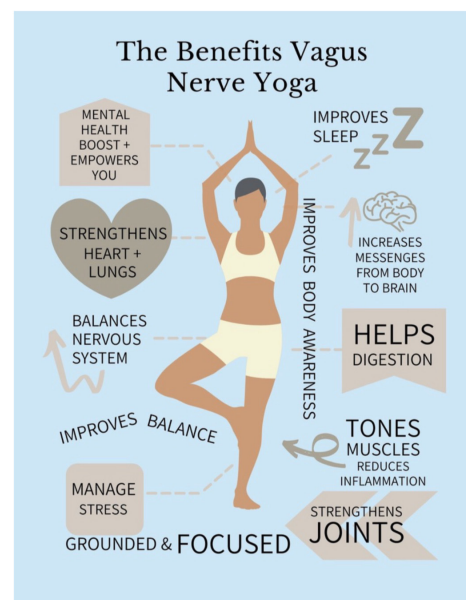
Another great breath practice is Straw Breathing. You can actually use a straw or imagine you are blowing through a straw. The idea is to take in a full breath through your nose. Then, very slowly blow through the straw until you've squeezed out every bit of air. Do this 5 - 10 times and then let your breath return to normal. (This is a prescribed practice for panic attacks).



**Stimulating the vagus nerve activates your parasympathetic nervous system.**



2. **Hum, Sing, Chant or Praise.** Your vagus nerve passes through your vocal cords and inner ear. The vibrations of sound, including singing, humming, and chanting, can stimulate your vagus nerve by engaging it through your throat, your diaphragm (as you breathe), and even through your heart.
3. **Cold Water Exposure.** Cold water is one of the simplest ways to stimulate your vagus nerve and improve your vagal tone. Splash cold water on your face and neck. Hold a zip lock bag full of ice against your face for 30 seconds. Drink cold fluids. Take a 30-second cold shower. Take a warm shower and finish with 30–60 seconds of cold water at the end.
4. **Support Gut Health.** A healthy diet that includes a variety of plants and vegetables, along with probiotics, has been shown to support healthy function of the parasympathetic nervous system.
5. **Exercise and Physical Movement.** Any kind of physical movement enhances healthy oxygen and blood flow, stimulating the vagus nerve, which travels through both the lungs and the heart.
6. **Earthing (Spending time in nature).** Earthing is a technique that helps you connect to the healing energy of nature and the earth. Connect to the earth by walking barefoot on grass, on the beach, or even on ceramic tile. A study published in *The Journal of Cardiology* found that being in nature, even for a few hours, has a calming effect on the mind and body – lowering blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and the levels of stress hormones, like cortisol in the bloodstream. With the reduction in cortisol, the body automatically returns to the parasympathetic state.
7. **Yoga.** Yoga incorporates many poses and breathing exercises that connect the back of the throat to the breath and movement, stimulating the vagus nerve through neck stretches, heart opening postures and body twists. When you end a yoga practice by sounding “OM,” the vibration stimulates your vagus nerve.



8. **Laugh and Smile.** Laughter truly is the best medicine, as it creates movement in your face, chest, diaphragm, and stomach, naturally stimulating your vagus nerve to change your breath, heart rate, and blood pressure. Because the vagus nerve extends into the face muscles, you can increase vagal tone by relaxing the muscles of your face and then slightly turning up your lips. Creating a “smile” can make challenging conversations or tasks more bearable.
9. **Sunlight.** Sunlight is a primary source of energy on earth and sunlight powers much of what is on earth, including the healthy function of your body. Exposing your skin to sunlight for at least 20-30 minutes at a time – ideally first thing in the morning – helps to stimulate your vagus nerve.
10. **Essential oils.** Your vagus nerve can be stimulated with natural, non-invasive essential oils applied over specific acupuncture and reflex points. Essential oils have both olfactory (smell) and transdermal (topical application) qualities. For example, inhaling essential oils such as lavender or bergamot has been shown to improve heart rate variability, a key indicator for vagal tone.
11. **Epsom Salt Baths.** Epsom salt is a naturally occurring mineral compound of magnesium and sulfate that helps enhance the detoxification capabilities of the body, improve circulation, calm and sedate the nervous system, relax muscles, and reduce swelling and inflammation. Studies have shown that magnesium helps calm your nervous system, alleviate depression, and calm anxiety. Magnesium is easily absorbed through the skin and into your blood stream, especially when delivered through a warm bath.
12. **Gargling and Gagging.** The vagus nerve activates the muscles in the back of the throat that allow you to gargle and control your gag reflex. Vigorously gargling water at the back of the throat for at least 2 minutes triggers these muscles to contract. If you can, have the water go far enough into the back of your mouth that you start to tear. Tearing is a sign that your choking-prevention reflexes are working, and that the vagus nerve is activated.



- 13. Practicing Gratitude.** Practicing gratitude is one of the fastest and easiest ways to activate your parasympathetic nervous system. Here's why: when you are feeling grateful and focusing on positive things, your mind shifts out of a state of worry and fear where anticipatory stress over potential future scenarios no longer activate your sympathetic nervous system or trigger the release of stress.
- 14. Use your tongue like a paint brush to paint the roof of your mouth.** Your vagus nerve is responsible for controlling many of the muscles in the mouth, including the majority of the muscles of the soft palate and the tongue. Stimulating the muscles of your tongue, like using your tongue as a paintbrush to stimulate the palatal muscles on the roof of your mouth therefore engages the vagus nerve and can activate a yawn which has its own calming effects.
- 15. Massage and Acupuncture Therapies.** Research suggests that massaging certain areas of your body, such as your neck, feet, and the carotid sinus (located on your neck) can stimulate the vagus nerve.
- 16. Chiropractic Adjustments.** A structural misalignment in your spine can block vagus nerve signaling. If you are out of alignment and your spine becomes altered in its positioning or ability to move freely, a chiropractic adjustment can help align the spine and nervous system to activate your parasympathetic nervous system.
- 17. Self-Compassion.** Because your brain cannot differentiate between anticipatory thought-driven stress and actual physical danger, when you focus on fears and worries, you activate your sympathetic "fight or flight" response. When you shift your focus to positive feelings like love, compassion, and goodwill toward yourself and others, you calm your stress response and activate your rest, digest, recover response.



**18. Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT).** Emotional Freedom Technique, also known as tapping, is a proven easy and accessible approach to instantly calm your nervous system. By using your fingers to gently tap on specific energy meridians on your head and torso, you help to release stored energy that is blocking the healthy flow of information. Stagnant physical and emotional energy correlates with dysfunction or dysregulation in your nervous system.

**19. Social Connection.** Your parasympathetic state can be activated through social connection. Your vagus nerve physically connects to your mouth and eyes, helping to both trigger and respond to safety cues from others, like smiling and eye contact. In other words, our social connection helps us feel safe and turn on the parasympathetic state. Dr. Stephen Porges, author of *The Polyvagal Theory*, explains, “Through the history of humanity, when humans were threatened, they mitigate the threat response through social interaction, through being hugged, through being with a trusted individual.”

Porges’s Polyvagal Theory identifies the vagus nerve as the safety gauge for your nervous system and the key driver of your emotional regulation, social connection and fear response. This social connection, be it in person, over the phone, or even via texts or social media, helps activate your parasympathetic nervous system and support health and longevity.

Information adapted from Judi Cohen, [www.vibrantblueoils.com](http://www.vibrantblueoils.com)

## CHRONIC STRESS AND THE VAGUS NERVE

If you are chronically stressed, your nervous system is out of balance. As a result, your vagus nerve will be weak and unable to control inflammation properly. When your sympathetic nervous system (fight-or-flight) is constantly activated, your stress hormone levels never clear sufficiently out of the system. Chronic cortisol exposure damages the tissues over time. Chronic stress is pro-inflammatory.

The vagus nerve plays a central role in coordinating the parasympathetic relaxation response, helping to slow breathing and heart rate, promote relaxation, stimulate digestion, and bring about a sense of peace and calm. To help coordinate this relaxation response, the vagus nerve releases the neurotransmitter acetylcholine, helping control inflammation in the body.

Chronic stress is not just a result of everyday stress. It is also a function of early exposure to stress, childhood trauma, negative beliefs and resulting chronic negative emotional states, negative behavioral patterns developed over time, poor relationship with yourself, toxic relationships, feeling socially isolated, and everyday challenges. I call this collectively emotional toxicity.

To check your emotional toxicity score, take my Emotional Toxicity Questionnaire. <https://www.dr-eva.com/emotional-toxicity-questionnaire>

Early exposure to stress and trauma re-wires your nervous system to become more hypervigilant (stuck in fight-or-flight). Luckily, this can be reversed. It is never too late to build neuroplasticity and learn to regulate your nervous system.

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