

# Research Paper: The Neurodivergent Pain Loop

**Title:** The Interplay of Neurodivergence, Chronic Stress, and Vagus Nerve Dysfunction in the Pathogenesis of CRPS Type 2

**Date:** January 10, 2026

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## Abstract

This paper examines the proposed "Thought Loop" connecting neurodivergence to Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS) Type 2. By cross-referencing clinical research with lived experiences from neurodivergent communities, we identify a cycle where sensory hypersensitivity and social masking lead to chronic autonomic dysregulation. This dysregulation, mediated by the vagus nerve, creates a physiological environment highly susceptible to the neuropathic changes associated with CRPS Type 2.

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## 1. The Genesis: Neurodivergence and Misunderstanding

**Scientific Context:** Neurodivergent individuals (Autism, ADHD) often possess a nervous system characterized by hyper-plasticity and sensory hypersensitivity (Han et al., 2024). Studies indicate that 30% of pediatric chronic pain patients show significant autistic traits (Han et al., 2024).

**Community Insight (Reddit):** Users frequently describe "sensory hell" and the exhaustion of "masking" to fit neurotypical standards. This disconnect between internal reality and external expectations creates a baseline of "misunderstanding" that triggers immediate physiological stress.

## 2. The Bridge: From Stress to Vagus Nerve Dysfunction

**Scientific Context:** Chronic stress leads to Vagal Withdrawal (low vagal tone). In neurodivergent populations, this is often a result of "faulty neuroception"—the brain's inability to accurately detect safety in the environment, keeping the body in a constant state of sympathetic "fight or flight" (Porges, Polyvagal Theory).

**Community Insight (Reddit):** Discussions in r/AutismInWomen highlight "vagus nerve hyperactivity" or "shutdown" as a common link to gastrointestinal issues and "coat-hanger pain" (neck/shoulder tension), suggesting a physical manifestation of prolonged emotional and sensory stress.

## 3. The Culmination: CRPS Type 2

**Scientific Context:** CRPS Type 2 involves distinct nerve damage. While CRPS is rare (5.5–26.2 per 100k), recent research shows an increased prevalence of neurodivergent traits in chronic pain cohorts (Kasahara et al., 2025). Chronic stress and neuroinflammation "prime" the nervous system for Central Sensitization, where the brain amplifies pain signals far beyond

the original injury.

Community Insight (Reddit): A user in r/AutisticWithADHD describes their CRPS Type 2 as "lava flowing through veins," noting that their neurodivergent hypervigilance makes it impossible to "tune out" the pain, creating a feedback loop where the pain becomes the primary stressor.

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### Comparison: Side-by-Side Analysis

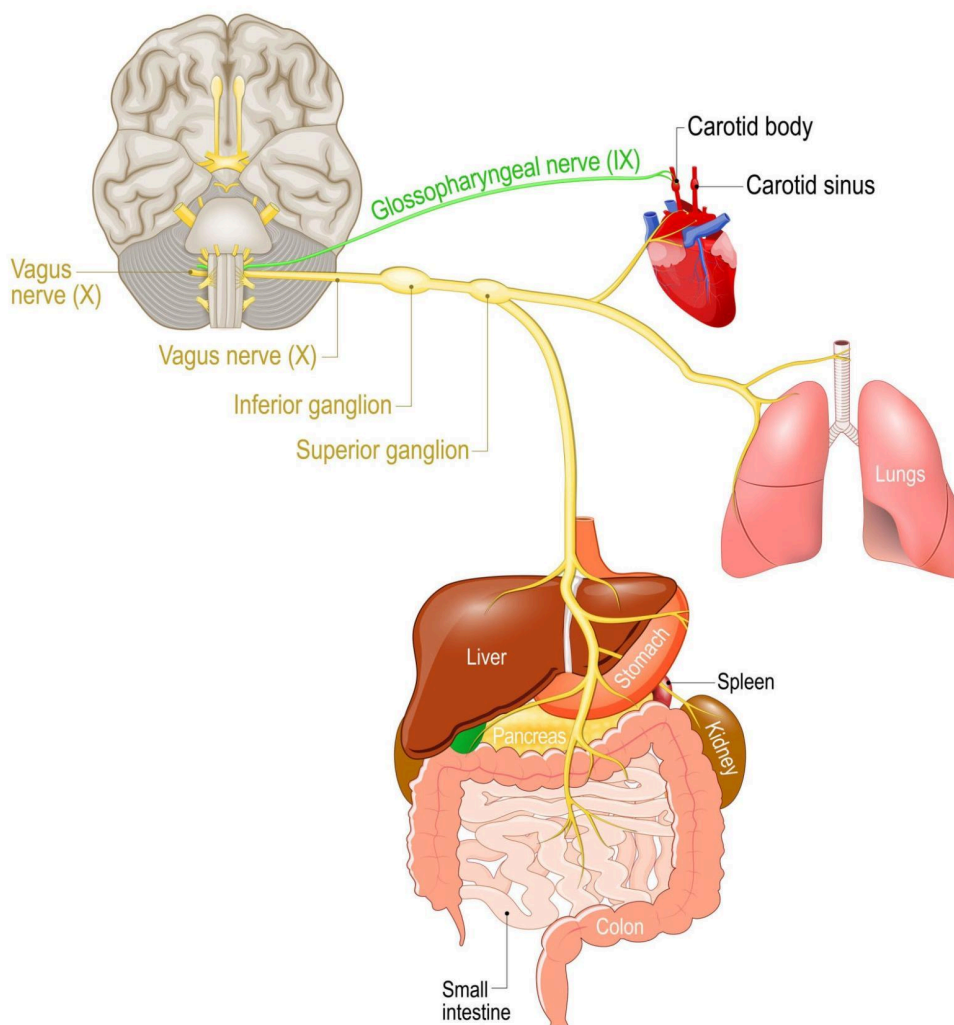
Factor	Scientific Research (Top-Down)	Community Experience (Bottom-Up)
<b>Stress Origin</b>	Autonomic dysregulation, low HRV, and sympathetic hyperactivation.	Social masking, sensory overload, and the trauma of "not being believed."
<b>Vagus Nerve</b>	Bidirectional signaling; VNS shows promise for anxiety and epilepsy in ASD.	Use of stimming, rhythmic movement, and safe "sensory nests" to regulate.
<b>CRPS Link</b>	Shared genetic markers (SCN9A) and neuroinflammatory pathways.	Heightened pain thresholds ("pushing through") followed by total collapse.
<b>Diagnosis</b>	"Diagnostic Overshadowing"—pain is ignored as a "symptom" of ASD/ADHD.	Doctors dismissal; being labeled as "dramatic" or "exaggerating."

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### Conclusion: Closing the Thought Loop

The "Neurodivergent Mind" is indeed at an increased risk for CRPS Type 2. The loop closes because the very traits that define neurodivergence—heightened sensory awareness and a reactive autonomic nervous system—are the same factors that make the body more susceptible to chronic, neuropathic pain. Chronic stress acts as the catalyst that degrades vagal tone, turning a "sensitive" system into a "pain-locked" one.

# The vagus nerve



Getty Images

## Sources

- **NeuroSpark Health (2025):** "Vagus Nerve Exercises for Neurodivergent Adults."
- **Kasahara et al. (2025):** "Chronic Pain in Neurodivergent Individuals: A Hidden Epidemic."
- **Frontiers in Pain Research (2021/2024):** "Neuroplastic Changes in CRPS."
- **Reddit Communities:** *r/aspergers*, *r/AutismInWomen*, *r/AutisticWithADHD*.
- **PubMed/PMC:** Research on SCN9A gene and ASD pain comorbidities.

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**Next Step:** Would you like me to create a visual infographic or a summary of specific Vagus

Nerve regulation techniques tailored for neurodivergent sensory profiles to help break this loop?