Basic Vagus Nerve Exercise

Handout 7a · Vagus Nerve Exercise Series · 305 Psychotherapy Group LLC

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What this does: Developed by Stanley Rosenberg, this exercise activates the vagus nerve by engaging muscles connected to Cranial Nerves IX and X. The eye-gaze shift triggers a parasympathetic response — most people experience a spontaneous yawn, sigh, or swallow as the nervous system releases tension and shifts toward calm.

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Pain & Comfort Check — Do this first

Slowly turn your head to the left and hold, noticing any stretch. Then turn to the right and hold. **If you feel any pain, stop immediately.** This exercise should feel like a gentle stretch only.



Turn head left



Turn head right

1

Cradle your head

Interlace your fingers and use your palms to create a supportive cradle behind your head. Lean slightly back in your chair so your head rests comfortably in your hands. Keep your head still for the rest of the exercise.



Interlace fingers, cradle head

2

Eyes only — look left, hold 30 seconds

Without moving your head, shift your eyes only as far left as possible — past your elbow. Hold for 30 seconds. If you feel the urge to yawn, sigh, or swallow — let it happen. If it doesn't come naturally, gently force one. Bring your eyes back to center.

> *This spontaneous release signals the vagal brake engaging.*



Eyes shift left — head stays still

3

Eyes only — look right, hold 30 seconds

Shift your eyes only as far right as possible — past your other elbow. Hold for 30 seconds. Again allow any yawn, sigh, or swallow. If it doesn't come naturally, gently force one. Return your eyes to center.



Eyes shift right — head stays still

4

Re-check your head rotation

Afterward, re-check your head rotation from the pain check. Most people find greater ease and range of motion — a sign the exercise worked.

Source: Rosenberg, S. (2017). *Accessing the Healing Power of the Vagus Nerve.* North Atlantic Books. | Porges, S.W. (2011). *The Polyvagal Theory.* W.W. Norton & Company.

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