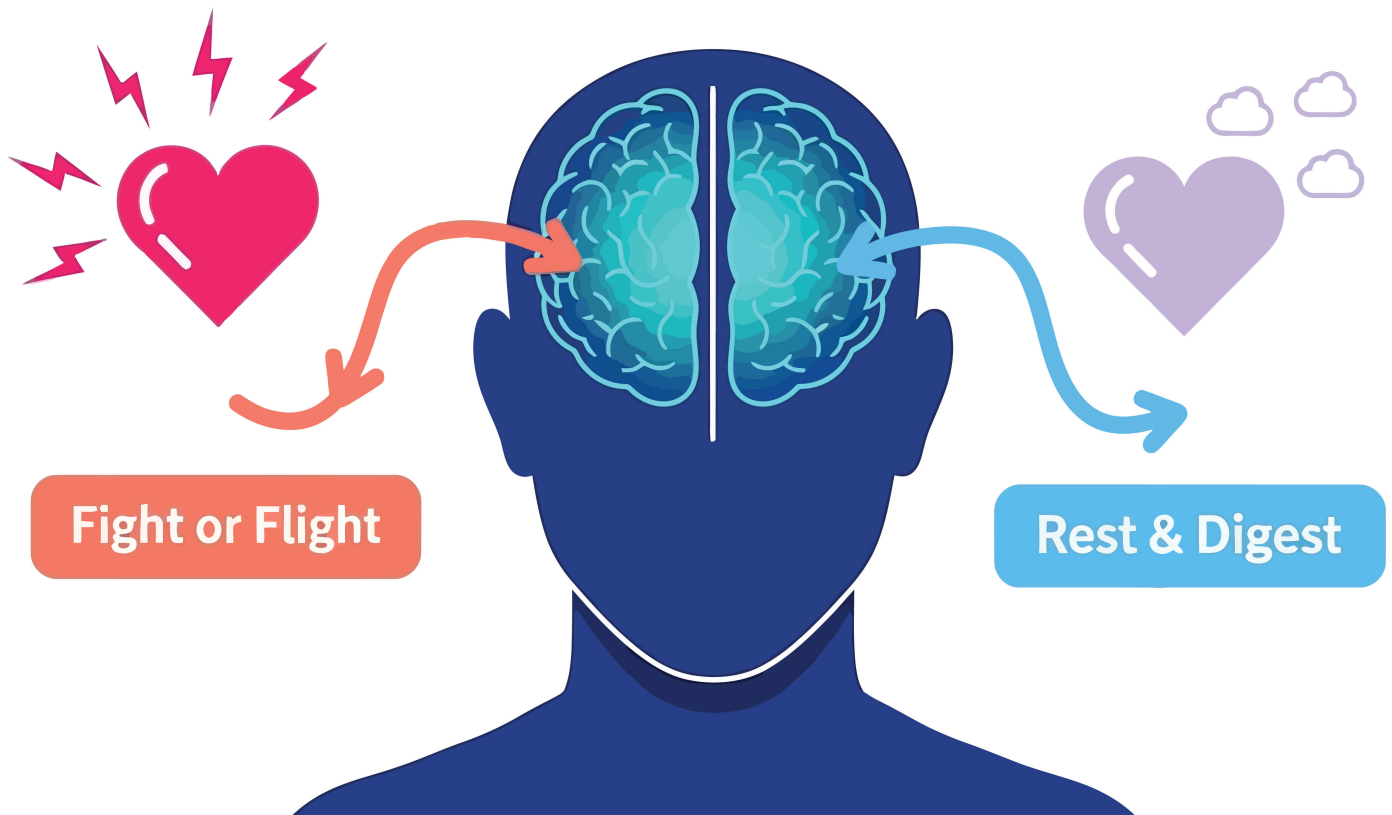


Stimulating the Vagus Nerve: A Guide to Calming Your Nervous System

Autonomic Nervous System Balance



What is the Vagus Nerve?

The vagus nerve is the longest cranial nerve in the body. It runs from the brainstem down through the face, throat, heart, lungs, and digestive tract – connecting almost every major organ along the way. One of its most powerful roles is helping your body shift from fight-or-flight into rest-and-digest by activating the parasympathetic nervous system.

When your vagus nerve is stimulated, your body gets the message that it's safe.

This can lead to:

- A slower heart rate
- Decreased inflammation
- Improved digestion
- Feelings of calm, safety, and connection

What Is Vagal Tone?

Vagal tone refers to the health and responsiveness of your vagus nerve. Just like a muscle, it can be strengthened with practice. A higher vagal tone means your body can more easily return to calm after stress. The more you practice regulating your nervous system, the more flexible and resilient it becomes.

You Can Stimulate Your Vagus Nerve

This document includes science-backed methods for activating your vagus nerve. While you practice these, gently bring your awareness to body sensations, emotions, and breath; this helps your system learn how to soften and settle more deeply.

Breathwork



Slow, diaphragmatic breathing: Place one hand on your belly. Inhale slowly through your nose, letting your belly rise. Exhale gently through your mouth, feeling your belly fall.

Exhale longer than your inhale (4 in, 6 out): Breathe in through your nose for a count of 4, then exhale through your mouth for a count of 6. Repeat several times.

Humming or chanting during exhale: Inhale deeply through your nose, then exhale with a gentle hum, chant, or the sound “voo.” Let yourself feel the vibration in your throat, chest, or lips as you continue.

Cold Exposure



Splash cold water on your face: Gently splash cool or cold water onto your face for a few seconds.

Dunk face in cold water: Fill a bowl with cold water, hold your breath, and submerge your face briefly.

Cold shower: End your shower with 30+ seconds of cold water. Breathe slowly to stay relaxed.

Sound and Vibration



Humming, chanting, singing, or gargling: Use your voice to create gentle vibration by humming, chanting “om,” or gargling.

Listening to soothing music or tones: Choose calming, steady music or healing frequencies (like binaural/bilateral beats – these can be found on Spotify). Let it wash over you.

Sound bowl or vocal toning: Strike a sound bowl or sustain vowel sounds like “ahhh” to feel vibration in your body.

Mind–Body Movement



Yoga, tai chi, or qi gong: I like to refer to YouTube for these practices – it’s so accessible! Try a beginner video to follow along. Focus on slow, flowing movements connected to your breath and body awareness.

Gentle stretching with breath awareness: Stretch mindfully and breathe into areas of tension.

Rhythmic movement like walking or dancing: Move in a steady rhythm while noticing your breath, steps, or flow.

Social Connection



Eye contact with someone you trust: Share a soft, comfortable gaze with a safe person. Let yourself feel seen!

Gentle, supportive conversation: Talk with someone who listens with care and helps you feel grounded.

Safe physical touch: Hug, hold hands, or lean on someone you feel safe with. (You can also hug yourself – your body still releases oxytocin and feels the comfort!)

Laughter and Joy



Belly laughter: Laugh deeply, even if you have to fake it at first – it still works!

Watching something funny: Watch a show, video, or meme that makes you genuinely laugh. I like to create giggly playlists on YouTube, Instagram and TikTok to have on hand for moments that I need them!

Play and creative expression: Paint, dance, journal, play a game, or do something playful just for fun!

Massage and Body-Based Support



Neck, foot, or abdominal massage: Use your hands or a tool to gently massage areas of tension.

Acupuncture or craniosacral therapy: Try a body-based healing session with a trained professional.

Tapping or self-soothing touch: Lightly tap or press on acupressure points; place a hand on your heart or belly.

Grounding and Presence



Orienting: Slowly scan your surroundings and name 5 things you see.

Feeling your feet on the ground: Press your feet into the floor. Wiggle your toes. Notice the contact and support.

Nature time or animal connection: Step outside, feel the air, watch the trees—or spend time with a pet or animal.

Final Tip: Pair Practice with Presence

When you engage in these practices with curiosity and intention, your nervous system learns what safety feels like. So don't just "check the box," really feel what's happening! Over time, this builds trust in your body's ability to return to calm, again and again.