

Nervous System Wellness: The Vagus Nerve Patient Education

The vagus nerve is the modulator of the nervous system and the gut-brain axis. Mind-body activities improve vagal tone, which controls activation of the nervous system and produces a calming effect. Engaging the parasympathetic nervous system, practicing self-care, compassion, and social connection can improve polyvagal tone.

Before polyvagal theory, our nervous system was pictured as a two-part antagonistic system, with more activation signaling less calming and more calming signaling less activation. Polyvagal theory identifies a third type of nervous system response that Porges calls the social engagement system, a playful mixture of activation and calming that operates out of unique nerve influence.

We suggest vagal toning exercises daily for 3-6 months to re-train the vagus nerve. For example, alternate nostril breathing (pranayama) 4-5 minutes 2-3x/day. Alternative options include:

- Breathing exercises before eating such as 4 square breathing.
- Mindfulness, meditation, yoga/light exercises and stretches, drawing, journaling, grounding, earthing, humming.
- Light touch manual therapies such as visceral techniques, manual hiatal hernia technique, cranial sacral therapy, acupuncture, and hydrotherapy are examples.
- Dermo neuromodulation is a technique using light touch that replaces pain signals with sensory signals. K tape can also help with nerve modulation.
- Check out podcasts on polyvagal theory by Dr. Stephen Porges

References: Steven Sandberg-Lewis ND, DHANP at Hive Mind Medicine.

Michael McMahon LMT, LAc at Moving Mountain Institute.

Lianne Aglietti, ND at WOAH Medicine LLC

