

Stimulating the Vagus Nerve to Better Manage Stress

There are simple ways to make the **vagus nerve and the parasympathetic nervous system** work more efficiently, with the added benefit of helping **navigate some of the stress life throws at us all**. Try some of these techniques to learn how to regulate this system and **feel better**.

Singing and humming increase heart rate variability (**HRV**), and a higher HRV has been shown to improve overall well-being.



Laughing naturally boosts immunity and, like singing, can increase HRV. Laughter is good for the soul, and smiling helps our bodies release cortisol and endorphins that provide numerous health benefits.



Exercise does a body good! It stimulates the vagus nerve, improving cognition and your gut flow.



Deep breathing, meaning taking deliberate, slow, and deep breaths, activates your vagus nerve and sends messages to your brain that help lower blood pressure and heart rate.



Gargling with water stimulates the muscles of the pallet and has been shown to improve working memory.



Cold exposure like taking a cold shower or drinking ice water can dampen the fight or flight response and increase the rest and digest response.



Yoga increases vagus nerve activity and helps to center and calm people. It can be particularly effective for people dealing with depression and anxiety.



Mindful meditation is intentionally focusing on the present without judgment, slowing down racing thoughts, and being aware of thoughts, sensations, and emotions as they unfold. Training your brain to observe and accept experiences without reacting can reduce stress and improve focus.



Your mood can be improved and the vagus nerve stimulated simply by silently repeating positive phrases to yourself. For example, gratitude statements like **“I am grateful for my dog because she makes me smile”** or **“I am thankful for my breakfast today,”** or self-affirmations, such as **“you matter.”**