

# Vagus Nerve Stimulation Exercises Handout

---

The vagus nerve is a crucial part of the parasympathetic nervous system, which regulates the body's rest-and-digest response. Vagus nerve stimulation can help manage conditions such as epilepsy, depression, and long COVID-19 symptoms. Below are exercises that can naturally stimulate the vagus nerve. These exercises should complement, not replace, professional medical advice and treatment.

---

## Physical vagus nerve exercises

These exercises focus on manipulating the vocal cords to stimulate the vagus nerve through physical vibrations.

### Gargling

Gargling with water can help stimulate the vagus nerve by creating vibrations in the vocal cords. To perform this exercise, fill a glass with water and gargle for 30 seconds to one minute. Aim to gargle twice daily, once in the morning and once in the evening. This simple activity can significantly impact your vagal tone by activating the nerve fibers in your throat.

Consistent gargling practice helps enhance the parasympathetic response, promoting relaxation and reducing stress levels. The physical act of gargling engages the muscles connected to the vagus nerve, making it easy and effective to incorporate into your daily routine.

### Singing

Singing is another excellent way to stimulate the vagus nerve through vocal cord vibrations. Choose your favorite song and sing loudly and clearly, focusing on sustaining the notes. Engaging in this activity for several minutes daily can improve vagal tone and enhance your overall well-being.

The act of singing not only activates the vagus nerve but also releases endorphins, boosting your mood and reducing stress. Whether you have a natural talent for singing or not, the key is to enjoy the process and let the vibrations do their work in stimulating the vagus nerve.

### Om-ing

Chanting "om" in a quiet space is a traditional practice that can deactivate stress-related brain regions and stimulate the vagus nerve. Sit comfortably, take a deep breath, and chant "om" while exhaling. You should feel the vibration around your ears, which connects to the vagus nerve. Repeat this for 5-10 minutes to experience the calming effects.

The practice of chanting "om" has been shown to lower heart rate and blood pressure, contributing to a relaxed state of mind. The vibrations produced by this chant can help in reducing anxiety and promoting mental clarity.

## Laughing

Genuine laughter is a natural way to stimulate the vagus nerve and promote relaxation. Watching a funny TV show or movie or spending time with friends who make you laugh can help activate the parasympathetic nervous system. Aim to incorporate activities that make you laugh into your daily routine.

Laughter not only stimulates the vagus nerve but also releases stress-relieving hormones, improving your mood and overall health. Engaging in regular laughter can enhance your vagal tone and support a healthier, more balanced nervous system.

## Yoga

Positions like forward folds (uttanasana, paschimottanasana), backbends (cobra, camel, and bow positions), inversions (sirsasana, salamba sarvangasana), and twists (jathara parivartanasana, ardha masyendarasana) stimulate and exercise the vagus nerve.

## Reflexology

The feet have over 7,000 nerve endings per foot. Reflexology techniques work these nerve endings, creating activity in the "default mode network" part of the brain and stimulating neural pathways. This helps activate the parasympathetic nervous system which promotes relaxation, digestion, and other restorative functions, counteracting the "fight-or-flight" stress response of the sympathetic nervous system.

---

## Psychological vagus nerve exercises

These exercises use emotional and mental activities to stimulate the vagus nerve and promote a sense of calm.

### Gratitude journaling

Expressing gratitude can activate the vagus nerve and promote a positive emotional state. Before bed or upon waking, sit down with a journal and write down three things you're grateful for. This practice can be done daily or weekly and helps calm the parasympathetic nervous system.

Gratitude journaling fosters a positive mindset and can reduce stress and anxiety by shifting your focus to positive experiences. This simple yet powerful exercise enhances emotional resilience and vagal tone over time.

### Deep breathing

Box Breathing is a technique that can help stimulate the vagus nerve and reduce stress. Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, exhale for 4 counts, and hold again for 4 counts. Repeat this as needed to achieve calmness and improve your parasympathetic response.

Deep breathing techniques like Box Breathing trick your body into a state of relaxation by slowing down your heart rate and reducing stress hormones. Regular practice can significantly enhance your vagal tone and overall well-being.

## **Meditating**

Meditation can activate the vagus nerve and promote relaxation. Find a comfortable, quiet place and use a meditation app like Headspace, Calm, or Insight Timer. Spend at least five minutes daily on guided meditation to experience its calming effects.

Meditation helps regulate the autonomic nervous system, reducing rapid breathing and heart rate while lowering cortisol levels. Consistent meditation practice can lead to long-term improvements in vagal tone and mental health.

## **Exposure to beauty**

Engaging with beautiful things can improve vagal tone and enhance physical health. Spend time in nature, watch a sunset, or look at art. Activities that evoke positive emotions can increase vagal tone and contribute to better physical health.

Exposure to beauty and positive experiences stimulates the vagus nerve, promoting relaxation and reducing stress. Incorporating these activities into your routine can have a profound impact on your mental and physical well-being.

---

## **Reference**

Migala, J. (2021). *Vagus nerve stimulation how-to (and 8 exercises to try)*. Parsley Health. <https://www.parsleyhealth.com/blog/how-to-stimulate-vagus-nerve-exercises/>