

Natural Vagus Nerve Stimulation

Your exam showed that stimulating your vagus nerve would help you manage some of your symptoms. The reason is the vagus nerve transmits information from the brain to tissues and all the organs in the body from the neck down to the colon. It delivers information from the gut to the brain, helps regulate heart rate, blood pressure, digestion, swallowing, movement, sweating, and more. Therefore, activating your vagus nerve, which works through the parasympathetic nervous system, can reduce inflammation, improve your gastrointestinal conditions, migraines, depression, and other conditions.

Below are ways to stimulate the vagus nerve. Do two of these exercises daily for at least two weeks. Use the attached checklist to record the activities.

Sing or Hum:

- Sing or hum loudly throughout the day. Since the vagus nerve connects to your vocal cords and muscles at the back of your throat, making sounds stimulates the nerves and vagal tone.

Gargle:

- Gargle with water several times a day. Drink several large glasses of water per day and gargle each sip until you finish the glass of water. Do this exercise for several weeks to help strengthen the vagal nerve pathways.

Deep and Slow Breathing:

- Take 6 breaths over the course of a minute breathing deeply from the diaphragm (your stomach should expand outward and your chest should not move). Breathe in to the count of 6-8 beats, then breathe out for 8-10 beats. The key is to exhale for a longer time that you inhale.

Valsalva Maneuver:

- Breathe out strongly through your mouth while pinching your nose tightly closed. Do this for five exhalations. This increases the pressure inside your chest cavity increasing vagal tone.

Gag:

- Using your finger (or a wooden tongue blade if you have one), lay it on the back of your tongue to activate a gag reflex. Repeat periodically during the day.

Cold Exposure:

- Splash cold water on your face
- Place ice cubes in a ziplock bag or washcloth and hold the ice against your face
- Take a cold shower or finish a hot shower with 30 seconds of cold water
- Go outside in cold temperatures with minimal clothing until chilled

Exercise:

- Lift heavy weights 1-4x per week
- High-intensity interval training 1-2x per week (<https://www.self.com/story/what-is-high-intensity-interval-training-benefits>)
- Brisk walks: 30-60 minutes per day (walk at a pace that makes you sweat)
- Or chose a sport or exercise routine you enjoy and stick with it consistently (every day even for a short time)

Meditation:

- Using a format you enjoy, meditate 15-20 minutes a day. Our favorite is the *Head Space* app.