

Vagus Nerve Exercises

Cheat Sheet



Eight quick, low-risk ways to nudge your body's calm system. Real physiology, honest expectations - and zero miracle claims.

1 PICK ONE OR TWO

2 PRACTICE WHILE CALM, TOO

3 EXPECT SUBTLE, NOT DRAMATIC

WHAT THE VAGUS NERVE ACTUALLY IS

The main parasympathetic highway between your brain and body - it carries the "you're safe, stand down" signal to your heart, lungs, and gut. "Toning" it just means practicing the calm response until your body finds it faster.

1 The Long Exhale

THE MOST DIRECT LEVER • 2 MIN

- Inhale through your nose for a count of 4.
- Exhale twice as long - a slow count of 8, like fogging a mirror. Repeat for 2 minutes.
- Lightheaded? Shorten both counts. Slow matters more than deep.



WHY Your heart naturally slows a little on every exhale - that dip is the vagus nerve working. A long exhale simply holds the brake down longer.

2 Humming and Singing

VIBRATION IN THE RIGHT SPOT • 2-5 MIN

- Hum a low, steady note and let it buzz in your throat and chest. Or sing along to anything - badly counts.
- Take an unhurried breath between rounds, and rest a hand on your chest to feel the buzz.

WHY The nerve runs right past your voice box, so humming vibrates its neighborhood - and stretches every exhale as a bonus.

3 Cold on the Face

DIVE REFLEX • 30 SEC

- Splash cold water on your face, or hold something cool to your cheeks and around your eyes for 30 seconds.
- Breathe out slowly while you do it.
- No sink nearby? A cold drink can pressed to the cheekbones works.



WHY Cold on the face trips the dive reflex, a vagus-driven slowing of the heart. One of the better-tested tricks on this page.

4 Gargling

LOUD COUNTS • 1 MIN

- Take a sip of water, tip your head back, and gargle for 30-60 seconds.
- Go loud enough that you can feel it working at the back of your throat.
- Easy habit anchor: gargle right after brushing your teeth.

WHY Gargling exercises throat muscles the vagus nerve helps run. Evidence is thin, but it's free, fast, and wakes up the whole area.

5 The Ear Trick

GENTLE PRESSURE ONLY • 2 MIN

- With one fingertip, slowly massage the bowl of your outer ear and the soft groove behind it.
- Small circles, light pressure, about a minute per side.
- Stay on the outside - never push anything into the ear canal.

WHY A small branch of the vagus nerve reaches the outer ear - the same spot ear-clip stimulators target. This is the low-tech version.

6 Eyes-Right Reset

FROM BODYWORK PRACTICE • 2 MIN

- Interlace your fingers behind your head and keep your head still.
- Move only your eyes to the right for 30 seconds, then to the left - until you notice a sigh, yawn, or swallow.
- That little sigh is your cue to stop - no need to force more.

WHY This one comes from bodywork traditions, not trials - but the spontaneous sigh it often triggers is a genuine "at ease" signal.

7 Laughing Out Loud

SOCIAL LAUGHTER COUNTS DOUBLE • 5 MIN

- Queue up the clip that reliably breaks you. Better yet, watch it with someone.
- Let it be loud and physical - real laughter works the diaphragm hard.
- Nothing landing? Even forced laughter tends to tip into the real thing.

WHY Laughter forces long exhales, and laughing with people adds social safety cues - two calm signals delivered at once.

8 Slow Belly Breathing

DAILY PRACTICE • 5-10 MIN

- One hand on your belly. Breathe so that hand rises - about 6 breaths per minute (in for 4, out for 6).
- Practice daily while calm, so it's there when you're not.
- Counting feels fussy? Just breathe out slower than you breathe in.

WHY Around 6 breaths a minute, heart rhythm and breath fall into sync - the best-studied way to build vagal tone over time.