

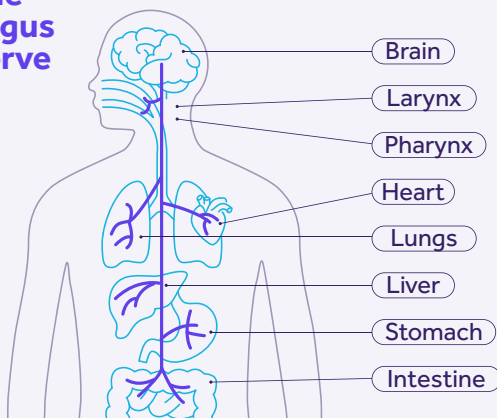


The vagus nerve: your body's power player

We've all heard that classic kids' song about the bones being connected. From head to foot, "dem bones" are connected.¹ But have you heard about the connection between your brain, your heart and your digestive system? It helps regulate everything from mood to skin sensations.

This connection—the vagus nerve—maintains your digestion, heart rate, immune system and more. It is the half of your nervous system that regulates your "rest and digest" functions.² Its branches can be found all throughout your neck and trunk, earning it the nickname of the "wandering nerve."³

The vagus nerve



Your vagus nerve affects many of your body's cardiovascular, digestive and immune functions:



Heart rate



Blood pressure



Inflammation



The release of digestive
enzymes, gastric acid
and bile



Contractions
of the stomach
and intestines

The vagus nerve regulates immune responses and prevents excessive inflammation. Uncontrolled inflammation can show up in many ways:

Acid reflux

Delayed stomach emptying

Irritable bowel syndrome

Autoimmune disorders

Metabolic syndromes

When your vagal function is impaired, it can lead to:

○ Increased risk of depression

○ Reduced ability to deal with stress



The vagus nerve has even been linked to cognitive functions like attention and memory.

Unfortunately, working on your vagal tone is not as simple as working on your muscle tone. Supplements and massages may help you feel better in many ways, but they cannot stimulate your vagus nerve or “reset” its function. The good news is that there are non-medical steps you can take to support your vagal tone. Consider:³



Deep breathing

Deep belly breathing promotes relaxation. Step away to a quiet space and try 4-7-8 breathing. Inhale through your nose for four counts, hold your breath for seven counts and exhale through your nose for eight counts.

Regular physical activity

Get 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise. Take a brisk walk, cycle or dance. Or spend some time in the gym for a strength-training session.

Brief exposure to cold

Turn your shower to cold for a few seconds, splash cold water on your face or take a cold plunge to wake up your peripheral nervous system.

Meditation

Mindfulness practices that encourage being in the moment can bring on a sense of calm.

Try to incorporate one or more of these activities each day to keep your brain, heart and digestive connection working smoothly.

Learn how Teladoc Health can help support you on your wellness journey.
To sign up or learn more, go to TeladocHealth.com/smile

Before starting any new exercise routine, talk to your healthcare provider to make sure it's safe.

¹<https://www.songsforteaching.com/folk/dembones.php>

²<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/body/22279-vagus-nerve>

³<https://www.massgeneral.org/news/article/vagus-nerve>

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