

TIPPS for Calming Down Sooner

DBT skills offer us the following “TIPPS” to help our bodies help us calm down.

T – Temperature – cold exposure, especially head and face

I – Intense Exercise – short high intensity activity

P – Paced Breathing - deep belly breath, slow full exhale

P – Progressive Muscle Relaxation- Squeeze and release 1 by 1

S – Sing, Hum, or Chant (or gargle)

MORE ABOUT WHY THIS MIGHT HELP

From Optimal Living Dynamics (<https://www.optimallivingdynamics.com/blog/how-to-stimulate-your-vagus-nerve-for-better-mental-health-brain-vns-ways-treatment-activate-natural-foods-depression-anxiety-stress-heart-rate-variability-yoga-massage-vagal-tone-dysfunction>)

It seems there is more information on this topic all the time. If interested check it out. Here are some short thoughts. The vagus nerve is the longest cranial nerve in our body. It connects our brain to many important organs throughout the body, including the gut (intestines, stomach), heart and lungs. The vagus nerve is also a key part of our parasympathetic “rest and digest” nervous system. It influences our breathing, digestive function and heart rate, all of which can have a huge impact on our mood and mental health. Special attention should be paid to the “tone” of our vagus nerve.

Increasing vagal tone activates the parasympathetic nervous system, and having higher vagal tone means that our body can relax faster after stress.

TRY SOME OR ALL OF THESE IN-HOME STEPS TO INCREASE VAGUS NERVE STIMULATION NATURALLY:

1. Cold Exposure

Try finishing your next shower with at least 30 seconds of cold water and see how you feel.

Then work your way up to longer periods of time. It's painful to do, but the lingering effects are worth it. You can also ease yourself into it by simply sticking your face in ice cold water.

Still not a fan of cold water rinse in the shower myself. Uuugh BUT I find holding a cold compress to my forehead and cheeks while breathing deeply for 5-10-15 minutes is helpful.

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2. Deep and Slow Breathing

Deep and slow breathing is another way to stimulate your vagus nerve.

Most people take about 10 to 14 breaths each minute. Taking about 6 breaths over the course of a minute is a great way to relieve **stress**. That's six 10 second breath cycles. Think count slowly to four on the in breath give a second to shift and breath out fully for four seconds taking a second to shift for another inhale. You should breathe in deeply from your diaphragm, expand your belly outward. Your exhale should be long and slow. This is key to stimulating the vagus nerve and reaching a state of relaxation.

“Square breathing” discussed in family calm down activities is helpful for me. 4-7-8 breathing is another breath pattern that I find helpful. <https://www.drweil.com/videos-features/videos/breathing-exercises-4-7-8-breath/> - Breath in deeply and quietly through nose for a count of four, hold gently for count of seven, exhale completely through mouth making a whoosh sound for count of eight.

3. Singing, Humming, Chanting and Gargling

Singing, humming, chanting and gargling can activate these muscles and stimulate your vagus nerve which is connected to muscles at the back of your throat. *One of my best parenting investments was a pair of over ear headphones. I could put these on and hum or sing along to something that helped me maintain if I needed to stay present with my child as she raged. This was especially important when my active engagement with her was more triggering.*

4. Yoga and Tai Chi

Yoga and tai chi are two “mind-body” relaxation techniques that work by stimulating the vagus nerve and increasing the activity of your parasympathetic “rest and digest” nervous system.

5. Meditation

Meditation can stimulate the vagus nerve and increase vagal tone. Deep breathing and chanting accompanying some yoga practice can enhance these positive impacts. (refer to #2 & #3)

6. Exercise

Exercise been shown to stimulate the vagus nerve, which may explain its beneficial brain and mental health effects.

Many brain health experts recommend exercise as their number one piece of advice for optimal brain health. Exercise is often suggested to include:

- Lift heavy weights 1-4 times per week
- High-intensity interval sprinting 1-2 times per week
- Walk - ideally 30-60 minutes every day

Walking, weightlifting, and sprinting are the best forms of exercise, but you should choose a sport or exercise routine that you enjoy, so that you'll stick with it and break a sweat consistently.

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“On the spot” activities outside of general fitness activities have also been helpful for me. Some favorites include: Vigorous alternation of squeezing and relaxing, swinging my limbs (legs and arms), bouncing, hopping, jumping jacks, shaking my arms and legs. Followed by focusing on how the ground or chair supports and holds me up.

7. Massage

Research shows that massages can stimulate the vagus nerve, and increase vagal activity and vagal tone.

Foot massages (reflexology) have been shown to increase vagal modulation and heart rate variability and decrease the “fight or flight” sympathetic response. Massaging the carotid sinus, an area located near the right side of your throat, can also stimulate the vagus nerve..

8. Socializing and Laughing

Even reflecting on positive social connections improves vagal tone and increases positive emotions. Laughter has been shown to increase heart-rate variability and improve mood.

Have you heard of Laugh Yoga? There are lots of resources about laugh yoga online. Here is just one link go ahead and search there are some funny things out there. Some might even make you laugh.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HJG63EXCmw> Happier in 5 Minutes –
Ida Abdalkhani, TEDxOhioState
March,2015



<http://www.tothegrowlery.com/blog/2017/4/18/six-different-types-of-grounding-exercises-for-anxiety-intense-emotions>