

Vagal Nerve Toning: Clinical Pearls for Pain, Stress, Trauma & Much More (Pt. 2)

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Editor's Note: [Part 1](#) of this article appeared in the January 2020 issue.

How do I address the Vagal Nerve in Treatment?

Acupuncture is a powerful treatment therapy for the vagal nerve, both directly and indirectly. In our TCM therapies, we can treat the underlying cause of imbalance, as well as stimulate or help regulate the function of this nerve and its connections. Certain points are especially effective, such as auricular points, neck points such as St 9, abdominal points such as Ren 10-17, and points that treat the lungs / diaphragm / lymph.

Other TCM therapies such as cupping, *gua sha*, and massage also help tone the vagus nerve.

Laser therapy has proven to be a profound treatment tool. I use it on almost every patient. I commonly use my laser with vagus nerve frequencies to prime my patients while performing their intake and also directly over my TCM treatment techniques. I have noticed incredible results just by implementing this in addition to my existing therapies.

Diaphragmic breathing while treating will also speed up the effects of vagal nerve balance. For your more stressed and wired-type patients, try having them alternate nostril breathing for five breaths before needle insertion or during other techniques.

Posture therapy helps to stimulate and set up optimal positioning for the vagus nerve to function with less stress / irritation. Movement and exercise are keys to optimal vagal toning, yet when performed in a compromised posture, increased strain and inflammation can reduce benefits.

Self-Care Recommendations

There are many great recommendations to optimize performance of the vagus nerve, but here is a short list:

- *Breathing* - Nostril-focused, slow diaphragmatic breaths. Especially effective when performed with some of the other recommendations below.
- *Cold exposure* - Whether a splash of cold water on the face or a whole-body cold plunge, this stimulus acts as a neurological exercise to train adaptations.
- *Movement* - *Tai chi*; high- and low-intensity exercise
- *Humming, singing, gargling and chanting* mechanically stimulate the nerve.
- *Prayer and meditation* - relaxation and realigning one's attention

- *Balancing the gut microbiome* with herbs and probiotics
- *Optimizing the omega-3 index* (email me at dustindillberg@gmail.com for more information on how to test this and some additional research on its vagus nerve effect)
- *Laughing and friendship* – a healthy social stimulus and love

What Does Research Say?

Massive amounts of research have been published on the effects of vagal nerve stimulus. Don't just take my word for it; perform a PubMed search and enjoy the vast amounts of information at your fingertips.

Clinical studies have been performed to determine vagus nerve stimulation's usefulness in treating fibromyalgia, migraine headaches, anxiety disorders, obesity, cardiovascular disease, chronic pain, autoimmune diseases, and many illnesses.

Researchers from Aarhus University and Aarhus University Hospital have even demonstrated that vagotomy (cutting of the vagus nerve; not my recommendation) prevents the development of Parkinson's disease by about 50 percent, suggesting that Parkinson's disease begins in the gastrointestinal tract and spreads via the vagus nerve to the brain.

Electrical forms of vagal nerve stimulus are also being used to treat epilepsy and depression. It's thought that vagus nerve stimulation could help to treat a range of other conditions in the future, including multiple sclerosis and dementia.

Spread the Word

It is time for us to take our knowledge and treatments to our community. As TCM therapists, we are experts in vagus nerve treatments. While we can treat imbalances and assist in recovery, it is critical to remember that this type of therapy and stimulus has been shown to prevent and reduce the severity of symptoms that come from accidents. It is imperative that we pre-treat and maintain optimal vagus nerve health to keep our vitality in an uncertain world.

Editor's Note: Ask the expert! Have a question for Dr. Dillberg about this article or another topic? Email him at dustindillberg@gmail.com. Your question may be the subject of a future column.

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