

## VAGUS NOURISHING

### Practice infosheet



The vagus nerve is part of our parasympathetic nervous system (the part that calms us) known as the 'social engagement system'. The vagus nerve itself stretches from our brain stem (where our limbic system – all the fight/flight reptilian stuff hangs out) around and to our chest and belly and connects eyes, ears, nose, throat, heart, and belly.

Having a strongly developed vagus nerve and social engagement system is essential to a healthy autonomic nervous system. Why? It means that when we get stressed we can come back out of that without too much hassle. It also means that we are less likely to go into unhelpful stress responses. We have more resilience. It is like an anchor that helps hold us steady in the face of challenges.

Many of us can use ongoing vagus nerve nourishing. The following exercise is one such way of supporting our vagus system. It is borrowed from Marti Glenn's teachings (in turn based on Stephen Porges work on the social engagement system). The sequence of hand placements follows the development of our vagus nerve in utero and beyond and very much ties it to this social engagement system.

This sequence is often very calming and nourishing. Sometimes it brings up some emotion or some old body memories, so go gently and feel into how it works best for you. If you feel you are straying into territory that does not feel good to you then STOP, seek advice, or play with it until you find a way to do it that feels good to you.

Twelve minutes of this a day has been shown to help strengthen this part of the nervous system, but just do as much as feels right to you.

#### SEQUENCE

1. Take your ears between thumb and forefinger down near the lobe, but with your index fingers in the shell of the ear and pull gently. This is sometimes called the 'happy face'. Notice what sounds come to your ears as you do this.
2. Bring your palms over your eyes with your fingers up towards your forehead. Notice what your closed eyes see/receive as you do this.
3. Slide the palms gently down until they cup your chin (again with fingers going up towards your cheeks). This is a good moment to feel love or gentleness

coming through your palms. Let this be a tender, loving holding of your own face.

4. Slide your hands gently down to your chest and let the palms rest there. Feel your heart space.
5. Slide down to your belly/solar plexus area. Notice your belly and how you take in food here.
6. Keep one hand on your belly and bring one back up to the chest/heart area. Notice what this is like to offer touch to both together.
7. Open your palms outwards and rest on your lap (or just in front of you) in a gesture of receiving.
8. Repeat as many times as you like.
9. Where possible engage in eye contact with someone soon after. If you are unable to do so imagine looking into the eyes of someone you love, enjoy, who supports or whom you enjoy.

You can spend as long as you like on each spot. You can play with bringing your hands to throat or lower belly. You might want to play with adding sound (your voice). Just follow what feels good to you, experiment, play, make it your own. **The most important thing is that you do this slowly, with presence and kindness and love.** The social engagement system develops best in the presence of someone who is really present, who sees us and accepts who we are, and has kindness and caring for us. To bring this strengthening you want to bring this intention to yourself.

If you have access to someone else you can have them do this to you and see what that's like.



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This information sheet was prepared by Chantal Jackson, August 2018.  
It is based on understandings derived from Somatic Experiencing trauma therapy.  
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