How Vagal Tone Shapes Focus, Mood, and Emotional Stability Transcript

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What the Vagus Nerve Does

Hey, in today's video, we're talking about the truth about your vagus nerve, the most important nerve in your body. And if you're dealing with trouble concentrating, if you're dealing with anxiety, depression, if you have heart rate issues, right, where your heart's kind of sputtering at times, if you're having trouble swallowing, it may be a problem with your vagus nerve.

Now let's talk about what the vagus nerve is. It's cranial nerve ten that starts in our brain stem. And it's the longest nerve in our body. Actually travels from our brain stem into our throat, helps control swallowing, and also helps activate the salivary glands for, producing saliva so we can start to break down to digest our food.

It also travels into the lungs, where it plays a really critical role in breathing and respiratory patterns. It goes into our heart and it helps. It's like a brake on the heart to help slow down our heart.

And then it travels into our stomach, helps produce stomach acid for good digestion, into our liver, where it helps produce bile for good bile flow so we can digest our food effectively.

It also gets into our pancreas and helps produce digestive enzymes and bicarbonate, and release those into our intestines for good digestion. And then it stimulates the muscle activity.

We call that peristalsis in our intestines. So as you can see, the vagus nerve is a really critical nerve in our body. I call it the most important nerve in your entire body.

And if you're having a lot of those symptoms like I talked about, you have to try to understand your vagal tone and do things. And I'm going to talk about in this video to help support and improve your overall vagal tone and so when we look at the vagus nerve, we know that it has got multiple different functions.

Okay. And all the things we talked about when it when we talked about digesting our food, we talked about breathing our heart rate. Those are all automatic.

We know what to think about those. And that's because they're part of our autonomic nervous system. So we don't have to think about our heart beating.

We don't think about breathing or how to think about digesting food. It automatically does that. And the vagus plays a critical role in that. Now when we look at the actual vagus nerve, there's a couple parts of it.

The ventral or front part of the vagus nerve helps with, you know, basically when it's activated, it puts us into a calm state and in a sense, a high performance state, like a state of joy, right?

A state of happiness and satisfaction and calmness. And we call it the rest and digest portion.

Autonomic Nervous System and Vagal Tone

We call that, our parasympathetic nervous system and our ventral vagal tone. Now also it can shift and kind of turn down activity. And that will move us into a state of fight or flight.

So when it starts to tune itself down, we get into fight or flight. And this is important. Like when we're exercising, we want to be in fight or flight.

We want our heart rate to go up, right. We want to be breathing faster, right? We also don't want to be working on digesting food. So we need fight or flight if we're trying to perform, if we're trying to do something at a high level, we

actually want to be in this state of fight or flight.

But it should be controlled that in a sense, kind of like driving your car. You kind of gradually put your foot on the brakes and gradually put your foot on the gas.

We don't want sudden jerky movements. And so when we're suddenly jerking and moving, that's a sign of poor vagal tone. If your heart rate just automatically jumps up, something happens.

You get immediate anxiety. Those are signs of poor vagal tone. Now, the dorsal or back portion of your vagus nerve is basically what's associated with the freeze response.

And so whenever we're, you know, throughout the day, we're either in a state of calmness right where we're at rest and digest like when we're sleeping at night when we're just relaxing on the couch.

Okay. Having a casual conversation. We are in this state of calmness, okay? Or we're in fight or flight or we're in a state of freeze. Okay. And for example, think about it.

You know, when whenever somebody goes into shock, for example, or they, they have this kind of freeze response, that's the dorsal vagus. If you notice that, you know, when bad things happen, you when adversity comes, you immediately get hopeless, you get depressed.

That's a sign that your ventral vagal activity is so low, you have such poor vagal tone that you've actually shifted into this freeze mode. Right? And this is all part of what's called the poly vagal theory, where when we're thriving, we're kind of jockeying between fight or flight.

So we have fight or flight at times and then back into this state of calm, openness, centeredness, connection, right of, you know, the ventral vagal tone.

And then when we're not doing well, we have poor vagal tone, we've got sudden thrusts where we all of a sudden our heart starts racing, right? Or we start to freeze, get depressed, have emotional instability, can't concentrate.

Okay. That's a sign of poor vagal tone. So if you're noticing that, you probably have poor vagal tone. So let's talk about how to test for that. There's tests you can do at home.

And then also on top of that what you can do to support your vagus nerve. So when we're looking at testing it a couple things you can do. One is the pupillary constriction test.

And this is basically just shining light on your pupil. So you can just take a little penlight you shine it right near your eye.

How to Test for Poor Vagal Tone

Okay. Now the I should be able to hold the pupil should stay dilated or should say constricted. I'm sorry. It constricts so it shrinks down and it should be able to hold that constriction for at least 10s if it, you'll start to see it pump, and then eventually it will blow out in a sense, and it will dilate.

So the pupil will get really large. Okay. But it should be able to hold for about 10s ten to 20s if you're noticing it pumping out right and dilating right away, that's a sign that the body is very fatigued, that we have very poor vagal tone.

And, we're not able to hold that pupillary constriction. So that's one test. We can also look at our blood pressure. So your blood pressure normally should be somewhere between at the top 100 to maybe up to 140.

If you're at rest. And at the bottom, the diastolic should be roughly between 70 and 90. Right. So the systolic between 100 to 140 diastolic between 70 and 90, if it's up above the 140 or below right.

Or if it's under 100 systolic, then that's a sign that you have poor vagal tone, okay. And you're not able to get the blood pressure up properly. And a lot of times when you have this, you also have a condition called orthostatic hypotension.

This is where you go from sitting to standing. And you feel really dizzy when that happens. It's a sign that your body wasn't able to adapt and get the blood pressure up where it needed to be.

Another sign is testing your heart rate to your breathing rate. Okay, normally your heart rate should be roughly 60 to 80 or so at rest. Let's say 60 to 80 beats okay.

And your breath should be roughly 12 to 20, right. And so roughly a 5 to 1 heart rate to breath rate ratio. If you're noticing your heart rate is going up higher than your breath rate, that's a sign of poor vagal tone.

So let's say your resting heart rate is up at 110, but your breath rate is 15, right? That's a signs of poor ratio.

Common Causes of Vagus Nerve Dysfunction

That's a sign of poor vagal tone. So those are major factors. Now what causes poor vagal tone. It could be high toxic load a lot of people are living in moldy homes.

It wears down their nervous system so much they get really poor vagal tone. Maybe you've had a history of trauma, so maybe you've had childhood trauma.

Or maybe, you're back from the military and you are in a war zone. Or maybe you had, you know, an abusive relationship that you're in if you have PTSD or some sort of history of trauma that may cause poor vagal tone in your system.

So those are all common causes. Chronic infections are another one. Poor blood sugar balance is another factor that needs to be addressed there. Head trauma.

Maybe you had a concussion or, you know, severe blow to your head that could cause poor vagal tone as well. So all things to be able to look out for, as far as root cause factors.

And then what do we do to support vagal tone? Well, one thing is try to create a calm, peaceful state. You can use relaxing music. You can, block out blue light at night, for example, do everything you can to optimize sleep.

One of the big things with vagal tone is the light that we're exposed to so early in the day, you want to make sure you're getting sunlight. You can also use red light and infrared boxes, and that can also be helpful, especially if it's overcast.

So you're getting good light exposure, getting proper UV light during the middle of the day as well, trying to get out in the sun and then at night blocking out blue light.

Ways to Support Vagal Tone

That's really key for helping optimize vagal tone. Optimizing your sleep in general is key. Also, you can obviously do different types of things with therapy and breathing habits.

Okay, doing even something like box breathing, which I've done previous videos on that can really help support vagal tone. So look to take long, deep breaths that can be really key.

And then because the vagus nerve plays such an important role with innovating the palate area, doing things like humming as well as gargling. So taking some water and doing like 30s of gargling as hard as you can, that can actually activate the vagus nerve and, improve your overall vagal tone.

You can also sing a lot of people sing in the shower. So singing, and really trying to project your voice in general, that will help with the vagal tone as well, especially if you're somebody that notices that, you know, your voice is very low, you have trouble swallowing.

A lot of these types of activities can really, really help with your vagal tone, with your swallowing ability. A lot of people with poor vagal tone, they end up with, you know, loss of appetite, and they also end up with, you know, trouble swallowing things.

Right. And so that can really, really help all these types of activities. And I'm talking about so humming, swallowing, singing like I was talking about gargling can really help activate that vagal tone and support your nervous system.

So those are all things that you want to be looking to do. The vagus nerve is the most important nerve in the body. Now what are some key nutrients that support the vagus nerve?

Magnesium. The vagus nerve loves magnesium. It also loves B vitamins as well as vitamin D. Vitamin D is key for optimal vagal tone. All your B vitamins, in particular vitamin B6 and vitamin B12, are really key for good vagal tone.

Zinc is very important. Magnesium is the most important one. In fact, supplementing and supporting your magnesium levels. I've seen that improve people's vagal tone very, very quickly, so that's something to consider as well.

So hopefully you guys enjoyed this video and got a lot out of it. Please share it with anybody that you know and that you care about.