Podcast Introduction and Guest Intros

like an actual withdrawal and not feel great and it can feel really boring sometimes if you're used to that constant fight or flight and the chase and dopamine that comes with that.

When you take that away and then you are working on activating the vagus nerve and this has happened to me and I've heard so many patients say this over the years, is there like Your health is shaped by more than symptoms.

Through real stories and expert insights, we explore how your genetics, environment, and daily choices affect your wellbeing. We uncover root causes and share practical tools to help you find the healing you need.

Welcome to the Forum Health Integrative Medicine Podcast. What if I told you one nerve in your body controls your stress, your digestion, you're mood, and even your inflammation?

Welcome back to the Forum Health Integrative Medicine podcast. I'm your host, Amanda. Today, I am joined by nurse practitioner Erica Shepherd and health coach Renata as we break down the one nerd that everyone seems to be talking about right now, the vagus nerve.

what it is, why it matters, and how it could be the missing link behind so many chronic symptoms. Let's dive in. Erica, Renata, thank you guys so much for joining us today.

Erika, do you want to refresh our guests and our audience's memories? Tell us a little bit about yourself. Absolutely. Thank you for having me, Amanda.

I am the nurse practitioner and lead provider at Forum Health here in Denver, Colorado. I have been a nurse practitioner for about 10 years and in medicine for 15 years.

I'm really passionate about holistic health. I do primary care and functional medicine and my method is what I call mind, gut and cells by building the foundations in these three areas of health I love to hike and be outdoors and do all the things that are in Colorado and I loved working here at Forum Health.

Thank you. Renata, how about you? You're a repeat guest here also. Do you want to give the audience a refresh on you and your background? Sure. Thank for having me.

This is great. I love talking about nervous system regulation. It's going to be fun. So I'm the remote health coach at Forum Health. We're working here for a little over a year.

My name is Grave Nutrition Health Coach, and I take a very holistic approach. I truly believe that to really treat and honor a human being, you have to understand everything that's going on.

So I just love coaching and I love what we can do for our patients in terms of bringing that human connection element and giving a little bit more time that sometimes the practitioners are crunched for time.

I'm happy to be there to bridge that gap and support our patient the best way we Awesome.

Why the Vagus Nerve Matters

Well, welcome back both of you guys to the podcast. So excited for this discussion. I feel like the vagus nerve is having a moment right now and everybody seems to be talking about it.

Tons of biohackers, influencers, I just listened to a great podcast by Ben Greenfield on the Vegas nerve. That was probably his second one that he's done.

It's having the moment and I want to talk about. Erica, why do you feel the VEGAS nerve having moment? Well, the Vegas Nerve should always be having a moment.

I hope it keeps the spotlight forever and ever. But I think why it's having moment right now is because We have come so far with medication, supplementation, exercise, nutrition, and yet we have still been suffering.

And what we're starting to find is that if we don't address this vagus nerve, which is in control of what's called our parasympathetic nervous system, you've heard rest and digest part of our nervous, system which we'll go into more detail about, that puts our body into what I call a hijacked state.

And so if we are taking all the right supplements, exercising correctly, eating all right foods and we're still out of balance in our body or our symptoms or disease process is not getting better, what we're finding is that when we start addressing vagus nerve dysfunction, that a lot of people who have been struggling to get better start to better.

That's because when the vagis nerve is activated, our body has a better chance of being in balance. And so this is, in my opinion, the most under-talked about, underutilized elephant in the room when it comes to overall health and wellness.

Totally. I completely agree. Renata, do you have any opinion? Yeah, I believe that this is like a great moment to be discussing this because I think nobody has, at this point in time, humankind has pretty much access to almost all information that we can, right?

Everybody seems to have a little bit of a health nut. Everybody's taking their supplements, everybody's doing their practices, everyone's listening to their podcasts, getting their favorite doctors' opinions on how they should do this or that to support their health.

But in the meantime, stacking habits, supplements, medications, so many things. And while sometimes doing less could be more, in my opinion. So I think that could just be the key missing piece in the healing process.

Absolutely. Well, I love that the vagus nerve is having a moment right now. It's a tool that I used and changed the trajectory of my recovery with burnout.

I think it was one of those missing pieces. That was doing all the right things and I was still just struggling. And the Vegas nerve, when I started activating that and treating that, and consistently too, because that's the key piece of this is consistency with it.

I, my health shifted in a way I can't even explain. I mean, it was like a 180 at like probably the, the eight or 10 week mark of me consistently doing vagal nerve activation.

Daily for eight to 12 weeks, I still do it almost daily today. And that was when I saw just a, a light switch just flipped in my body. I want to take a second for those who might not know what the vagus nerve is.

I kind of said, it's the one nerve that does all of these things, right? But if I were sitting in a seat with you, Erica, and you were explaining to me what, the Vegas nerve as a patient, how would you explain what that Vegas is?

Absolutely. Absolutely, I have to explain things in very metaphorical terms and patients seem to appreciate that. So I'll do that here, but technically it is one of the largest, if not the a largest nerve and the body going from the brainstem all the way down through your abdomen.

What it does is it regulates everything, like you said, from digestion to your cardiovascular system to the immune system.

How the Vagus Nerve Works

what's very interesting about the vagus nerve is that 80% of the signals are going toward the brain in the vegas nerve and only 20% Of the Signals are Going Back.

So it is what I call this master data collector. it's taking in all this information from your environment and how you're perceiving your environments and giving the brain data to then come back and give it signals of how to influence these different systems throughout your body to react.

And specifically, it gets activated when the body is in safety. That's what activates rest and digest. You have to feel that you're safe or else the other part of the autonomic nervous system, which is the sympathetic nervous, system will get kicked into gear and the vagus nerve will be down-regulated and kind of take a step back.

And so when we talk about activating the Vegas nerve, It's really about activated safety in the possible ability. I love that. So the vagus nerve is the main nerve of the parasympathetic nervous system, which is your rest, digest and heal.

When your parasympathy system is activated, your body is telling itself it's safe, it secure, and it calm. when it is not activated we are in the sympathetic nervous which our flight or fight.

Which I can say that Most patients are in the flight or flight response. Correct. The majority of the time. Because your body responds to everything. Everything.

Yes. Your thoughts. The food you come in contact with and eat, if you have an infection in your body, it's triggering the sympathetic nervous system. You don't know the difference between a pathogen in you gut that's giving you an infections or causing some sort of issue versus a lion or a tiger chasing you.

Our brains don' differentiate between different stressors. It is the same response The stressor does not matter. Correct. Love that. Well, I guess I don't love that I Don't that my body is just like, oh my gosh.

There's the flight or flight response. You just stubbed your toe I'm not running from a lion. I just stabbed my toe Right. But again, the body knows that something happened that could be threatening I also think it's really interesting that you said that it receives all of those signals, like 80% of its job is just interpreting signals from the body.

And I think that also just shows us how many signals our body is sending. It's every cell in the and this nerve is the longest it goes from your brain, it in your face, in in heart, your lungs, gut, all the way down, taking information from everywhere.

Absolutely, and so with that, like we said, we don't love that we are in this constant, stressful environment, but what we can respect is that it is this massive data collector that's, again, taking 80% of these signals and going up from all these different areas of our body, taken information from the environment around us, it's assessing for threat.

for threat of safety and that like you said could be physical or it could Be down to the cellular level like be a pathogen or It could, be emotional threat and so all that to be said any of the things that it perceives as a threat it's going to take a step back and then the sympathetic part of our System is going, to kick in which down, did the cell level releases a, whole different cascade of hormones catecholamines and neurotransmitters that are going to completely change how your body functions.

Yeah. Renata, from a health coach perspective, how important is the vagus nerve to you when you're talking to your patients? Well, it starts by assessing how the patient is, right?

Like, I think it's very quickly when you start a session, you kind of get an idea of what's going on and how activated that person is. Usually when we meet with patients, because there's something going, they come to see a provider because they're experiencing some condition, some disease, symptoms that are bothering them.

So it's very important to just like kind of gauge where they're at. And I think the one, the most important things I find it when it is trying to like bring them a sense of safety and security so that they can feel heard and they feel like that's a perfect, 100% judgment-free safe space where it can just exist.

Creating that relationship alone can be extremely healing. I mean, that is why after working a few sessions with patients, Maybe the first time they come and see you, they might be not understanding why they're there or what am I doing here?

I'm not sure about what the health coaching is. It's all very new. Is it one more thing for me to do? Am I already overwhelmed? But then as we go through the sessions, I approach with curiosity and try to meet people there at.

they start understanding that this could be whatever they want it to be, right? But I just want to bring an example that you see the progress throughout the sessions too.

I've had patients coming in, I had multiple patients come in where they literally cannot even sit for a session. They just walk in with the phone or walk with a camera and just in an absolute state of distress, and seeing that and transforming that into like, hey, it's okay.

And sometimes the nervous system has a function of protecting. They might not be ready to completely calm down because in some level it is protecting them, right?

So that protection is always going to be more important than the transformation that we can possibly do with somebody, So I think it's a very interesting thing and also a Very interesting distinction.

Stress, Dysregulation, and Symptoms

I Think it is very important for our listeners, for patients to understand is that stress is not necessarily a bad thing. The thing is about, you know, we are bound to be stressed no matter what.

Just being in the world. And the way we perceive things, things can be perceived as stress, even minor things. Whether it's a deadline, whether there is somebody yelling in your house, or whether it is noise on the street, what is going on in traffic, anything can perceive as a stress.

But the question is, how do we create that resilience, right? And that's one of the things that is the most important thing. And we can maybe unpack a little more around this subject, because how are simple practices that we do so that were able to regulate go through the periods of peak stress that are important for survival, as well as the period of regulation and parasympathetic state where we have the ability to rest and digest.

Absolutely. Totally agree. I know that when I was doing more coaching, because I'm a little bit more out of the coaching role now, but I used to do health and life coaching.

And one of things that I would use to with my patients was deep breathing exercises before meals specifically, trying to shift their body from a stress state to a rest and digest.

issues with eating, digestive upset when they ate and things like that. And it was because they were always eating in a stressed state. So I would work with them and do deep breathing exercises to Not trick their brain from, Hey, you're safe by doing these deep breathing exercises.

You are sending a signal to your vagus nerve that says I am safe and you can digest your food better before you eat. So lots of, lots different areas that people can activate at home from the comfort of their own home.

And it doesn't have to be challenging or difficult. But I wanted to take a quick step back also because I want to ask you, Erica, because this nerve that goes everywhere, right?

It affects our digestion. It effects our heart rate. And I'm just curious, how does the vagus nerve influence things like

digestion and heartrate? Absolutely.

So when it is activated, it's going to send signals to the heart to slow down, to help with better vasoconstriction and dilation processes. And I've had people even in the past who start to regulate their vagus nerve and these occasional arrhythmias that they'd have has started to disappear.

And so again, it helps with that regulation in their cardiovascular system. As far as digestion, helps going into that rest state where the gallbladder can release bile effectively, that the stomach can produce stomach acid effectively.

There's going to be proper peristalsis, if you guys remember that from high school biology, which is the little contractions that happen throughout the whole thing.

Come back, I have a ton of patients who get SIBO, small intestinal bacterial overgrowth, and the biggest reason for recurrence is because of stress. And they're not having proper paracelsus, so the bacteria from the large intestine will then be like, hey, what's up here?

Because there's not proper peristalsis and it's stagnant, they can go for a little trip up into the small intestine, which is not where they belong. They migrate back.

Yes. So I always tell people if I'm treating them for SIBO, I like, hey, the biggest thing between now and as we're doing treatment is you've got to work on your stress so that your The intestines can have proper peristalsis so you don't get a recurrence.

And then regular bowel movements. It could go both ways for people. Some people have overactive perestals with their stress and if the vagus nerve isn't intervening enough and they think you can be going too much, other people, it's the other way.

They get more constipated because it goes into more for freeze. So think of, you know, the stress responses are fight, flight or freeze that can show up in your gut.

Yeah, everywhere because the vagus nerve is like the flight or flight affects your whole body. If you're in a state of stress, if you are in your sympathetic state, you in fight, flight, or freeze and that is your entire body, it's not just one part of your body so your gut freezes up so you don't get the digestive enzymes, all those juices to break things down.

Have you ever felt like you've got like, after you eat a meal, if you feel like just got something sitting in your stomach, you ate in a restful state.

You don't have things moving. If you're cooking. So when you pull a heavy feeling in you stomach it can be a sign that your vagus nerve is under-activated to be able to help with that process.

I would also love to, If we have a moment here, talk about the immune system in the vagal nerve. So, yes, I have a case study of a patient that I just love the story so much.

She came to me with what was appearing to be MCAS, which is Mass Cell Activation Syndrome, for those of you who don't know. And it was this really, her immune system for a year and a half was in this hyperactive state where She could only eat basically chicken and rice.

Every other food seemed to be a activator for her. What was fascinating is she'd already been to her primary care and to specialists. And the specialists were an allergist and a rheumatologist.

Everything came back negative. Her food sensitivity panel also came negative, like she didn't have that. When people come back, with these overactive immune symptoms and everything else tests negative, that is a absolute red flag that this is totally related to the vagus nerve and nervous system.

And so we did do gut testing as well. Her gut test was actually pretty good except for one pathogenic bacteria, which we didn't treat. However, I invited her that we were going to work on her nervous system and do these mind-body medicine sessions, Which I do here in Denver.

And it's really working on that mind body connection and the vagus nerve. And she unlocked some actually repressed trauma that she had forgotten. That was not the goal of the session, but that ended up being where it went.

And in six months, she is almost able to eat all foods again. She is no longer going up, you know, her. her throat closing up when she eats or her lips blowing up like a balloon.

And that was simply from a little bit of gut work and Vegas system work. I tell that story because that is how incredibly powerful the Vegas nerve is.

The specialist didn't know what to do with her and they want to put her on Zolair, which is a very potent of immune suppressing drug. And I said, how about we work on this first, and then if it doesn't work, we can consider that route.

But I would like to try this, first. She was agreeable to that because she didn't want to go on it either. Here was this very clear immune disorder that she was able to get under control with Vegas system work.

vagus nerve system work and what I invite people is to you know again you have to do all the tests you, have look at everything you. Have to remove things there that might be harming your body but again if we didn't address the vagis nerve she'd still be suffering and so that's how powerful it is in all areas of the body.

Let's talk about how people actually feel When they have vagus nerve dysfunction or dysregulation, how does somebody feel? Because I have had my own unique experience.

I feel like I resonate a lot with your, that case study, but how, would somebody be able to say like my nervous system's not regulated or I might have Vegas nerve disfunction?

I'll let you take this one. Feeling exhausted, but wired. Wired and tired. Not being able to sleep, feel absolutely overwhelmed, sensitivity in all different areas.

I mean, whether it's food sensitivity or noise sensitivity, or emotional sensitivity. And I'd ask women even get hit harder because of all the hormonal fluctuations, especially what we're talking about.

perimenopausal women, which is another subject that we're starting to talk more about and understanding better. So, I mean, it can present in different ways, or it could be kind of like the opposite, when the person has gone through that for so long, then I guess it gets in the territory of adrenal fatigue, right?

I would guess, not only is it nervous system related, but it only gets to the point that you deplete your adrenals, and then Erica can talk to more of all that.

Right. I would say hysterical kind of feeling could also be kind like, you know, not being able to listen and being, um, reactive. Right? And there's so many different ways you can present outside.

Yeah. Correct. How presents physically in each person is individual, but I'd say an overarching theme to back off Renata is wired and tired. And the other thing I hear a lot of is low capacity things that I, that typically, could be able to handle.

But then it's like, I can only handle two out of these 10 things. And it gets way lower for what you're able do brain fog, tired, it could unrestful sleep.

No matter how it shows up anybody, your capacity is overall lower when your vagus nerve is under functioning.

Your, I like what you said last. You're just, your body is at low capacity and that means everything is affected.

I, neurologically speaking from the emotional side of things, you feel completely dysregulated. One emotion feels like 10 times escalated, right? Like you just cannot control anything.

Your body. Always feeling on edge. but you're also exhausted. You have very poor stress resilience and that can look different for a lot of people. Cardiovascular wise, and I know I had this too, I have such an elevated resting heart rate when I did triathlons, marathons.

I worked out. My typical base heartrate was like five years ago or so was like in its sixties, fifties 50, 60s. And my elevated, my resting heart rate was 80. It was so much higher than I was used to.

You typically see a low heartrate variability, which is something you can actually test for. Palpitations again, also, because all of your systems, digestive wise, we just started talking, loading, constipation, low slow motility, meaning like you're not really going to the bathroom that regularly.

IBS symptoms can be both. Chronic fatigue, also poor recovery. Yep. Poor recovery physically from workouts, poor recover from illnesses. It just, it affects everything.

And one thing that we didn't talk about earlier too was inflammation, how does the vagus nerve control inflammation?

Inflammation, Burnout, and Modern Stressors

I think that's an important one to talk about, because inflammation kind of just seems like this very broad thing that affects so many things. And I forgot to ask it earlier, but I do think it's important to come back to of how is the Vegas nerve controlled inflammation because we know that chronic inflammation messes with our entire body.

And if the vagus nerve is controlling this, it makes sense that if you're consistently able to regulate that inflammation, you are also going to feel better also.

100%. And so the vagus nerve's job is to help get that body into that balanced state. Again, we're safe. Where chronic inflammation can be fueled by a lack of vaguss nerve intervention, it's kind of like a fire with no hose and no water to balance it out and calm it down so that the fire gets out of control.

Yeah, so with that being said, I have a lot of patients and I've been that patient too, from firsthand experience, that, again, a big missing piece if people are eating super anti-inflammatory and they're, you know, doing all the right movement and exercise and have the biomass and the red light and peptides, but your vagus nerve is still underperforming and you're in a chronic stress state, it is an uphill battle and having this cascade of inflammatory processes going on in your body with no control around it.

And the vagus nerve helps provide that control because inflammation is actually a really good thing. We need inflammation for the body to heal, but it's how, where, and when, right?

But again, when it is out of control and there's no how where and and it just running amok, that's when becomes damaging. And so again, that's like the big thing is when we talk about the vagus nerve, all of these symptoms.

Yeah. It's because the sympathetic nervous system is on constantly. And when the sympathetic is unconstantly, you don't have this dial to control the inflammation in the body.

So it's just always going. You need to activate your parasympathetic nervous. In order to. control the inflammation in the body. I think what you just said Amanda is really important to understand because life, say even a hundred to two hundred years ago, the culture we lived in, and the environment we're surrounded by, had this Vegas nerve dominant culture.

Like we were not working, you know, 12 plus hours a day. We were being constantly surrounded by news and social media scrolling and EMFs. Yes, and EMFs and process that are out of our control.

We're exposed to stressors that we don't even know. Totally. And so when you're saying you need to activate your vagus nerve, we live in a time anymore that it has to be intentional.

Because the culture and environment that we live in is designed to keep us in constant sympathetic activation. And so if we want our vagus nerve to be activated and to work, it is unfortunately, or fortunately, whatever way you look at it, gonna be on us to intentionally take practices to slow down and activate it.

Totally agree. So my next question is, how does the vagus nerve, this kind of seems like a silly question because I feel like we're just talking about it.

It's all the stress around us, but the Vegas nerve. How does it become dysregulated? What do you see in patients and how do, from a health coach's perspective, How Does the Vagus Nerve Become Dysregulated?

I think the feeling I have is that it's kind frog in a pod situation. People don't realize it's happened until we have until it got to the point of burnout.

Right? Like, I think, you know, like, The way Western society works, I mean, you go to school and you get out of school, and get a job, And you're excited about it and want to do multiple things.

You're young, going to multiple thing. And in your 20s, then I feel like late 20's, that's when I felt like people start kind of getting to that state.

So then kind like, already kind getting more serious about a jobs situation, working long hours to try to prove yourself in a career. I think all those things kind are like…

get out there and start a family and get a relationship and everything changes. I guess each decade, each phase of life progresses, I feel like we just accumulate roles, accumulate responsibilities, accumulated functions, accumulating things we want to do.

I believe that people don't just want to, not everybody's like selfless, but I guess some people to a certain point of degree, they want be good people and they wanna do their job.

And they wanted to provide for their family. They want you to be able to. Be a good person in society, whether it's in the church or their community groups and give back when they can.

When there's time for rest. I don't know when. It's like less and less time, more and more responsibility with less intention on ourselves. Less intention and time.

I feel like what you described is what I think most people go through and it's exactly how this adds up, it's like the compound effect. You're also, you have a different stress resilience in your teens and in you're 20s than you do in 30s, 40s and 50s.

As you age, your stress resilient naturally declines. One, because you more stressors, body's battling things, but you are also aging. So you can't expect to have the same stress resiliance at 18 as you did when you were 40, number one.

stage of life. So you go from people taking care of you to learning how to take care yourself to taking of other people, and then you have to start taking the people who took care you also.

And then to Erica's point earlier is where we are in 2026 is not where were in 1988 or 1970. The amount of stressors that we come in contact today, the way that work, treat ourselves, talk to ourselves.

The news, everything that's going on. There's just a different level of stressed that hits us as we age, but also where we are in society is so different from where were even 20 years ago.

Yeah. And the technology that supposedly was meant to make things easier and better now creates another realm of expertise. It's another constant stressor.

Yes. We have an EMF podcast coming up that we're going to be working on in like a few weeks. There's so many stressors out there that we don't even understand that.

We're being hit with nine times out of 10, AMF, air pollution, like things that are not in our control, but they are constantly putting us in a flight or flight, whether we sit and we were like, Oh, I'm calm.

I must stress free person. You're still having your flight flight activated, weather you like it or not based on your environment. The other thing that I think is really important to mention around the stressors we're experiencing in 2026 and Renata, as you're talking about like chasing the career and adding the family and the relationships and accolades is that these stress loops in the nervous system in brain can become very addicting and then activating the vagus nerve can feel like a withdrawal.

like an actual withdrawal and not feel great and it can feel really boring sometimes if you're used to that constant fight or flight and the chase and dopamine that comes with that.

When you take that away and then you are working on activating the vagus nerve and this has happened to me and I've heard so many patients say this over the years, is there like At Forum Health, we uncover the why behind your symptoms.

With advanced lab testing, hormone optimization, and cutting-edge therapies, We help you heal and perform your best. And now, through shopforumhealth.com, you can access physician-grade supplements trusted by our providers, supporting everything from adrenal health to focus and longevity.

Learn more at forumhealth.com and explore supplements at shopforumhealth dot com. I feel bored. I don't know what to do with myself. The other thing that can happen when you activate the vagus nerve and you get out of that fight or flight is stuff that's been sitting there that hasn't been felt and dealt with can then now come to the surface.

And I have patients like, I'm feeling more calm, but I am crying all the time, or I more calm but I'm having these like bursts of anger and this and that and there and what you have to understand is that your body and the nervous system will put things on hold when you're not safe and then once you finally feel safe the body will go through its process to work through them.

And so, again, when you start to activate the vagus nerve after a time of, you know, extreme or long-term fight or flight, it's another journey of its own, and we do not talk enough about how that can feel for people.

And why do we go back to the sympathetic? Because again I don't have to deal, there's a lot of dopamine, even though I'm miserable and I am exhausted, It's like this constant high.

Very well. I'll also say, cause I, I did, use vagal nerve therapy, vagus nerve, therapy a lot for myself personally.

How the Vagus Nerve Becomes Dysregulated

And I can A, just say yes to all of that. The emotions. Yes. Hit the nail on the head right there. But. The, I feel like change is just not something when we are consistently in the sympathetic nervous system state, right?

The fight or flight. Like you said, it's addicting. Our brains are also not wired to want to change. And that is a biological thing that our brains. Whether change good or not.

I used to talk to my coaching patients about this all the time when they were like, Oh, well, I feel like I'm self-

sabotaging all the time. That is your brain's way of trying to go back to a state, whether it was good or not, that it recognizes and knows.

You might have been 20 pounds overweight, but your mind, your body still recognizes that as its safe state because it's… It doesn't want to change. We know that it's healthy to lose the 20 pounds.

we know it is healthy for a walk. And your brain wants to self-sabotage because it doesn' recognize those things. And so that's why it's so important to have a coach on your side to help remind you of those things that it is okay if you take a step back, but you just need to keep on one step moving forward because one set back doesn't mean that you have to stay there.

You just have keep taking those three steps forward. Because your brain is going to try and trick you to self-sabotage and it okay that happens because it happens to everybody.

Nobody is perfect. It's really about what you do consistently. When you do self-sabotage or when you fall back into an old pattern, it's about getting back on track and moving forward again.

I think to piggyback off of that, Renata, you might also have this experience with your clients that you're coaching. When I'm developing a care plan for a patient, One of the top thoughts in my mind as the provider is what is going to keep the patient's body in the most safety throughout this process, that they are going be successful.

Because again, too much change or too many dysregulation is gonna completely, like I said, sabotage the end goal. I think it's great that you take this into consideration.

It's beautiful. Yeah. We need as providers to think about, or in coaches, we need to thing about what is going to keep the patient's system most regulated throughout this whole process.

Because it is gonna put an edge no matter what, but how, and how that's gonna look for everybody is different. And we have to that consideration as we're developing care plans and working with patients to come up with their care plan to get them to where they want to be and to how they wanna feel.

Absolutely. And then as coaches, it's our job to try to figure out how to match what will be the ideal situation, meaning the care plan and I'm executing an ideal way and seeing where the patient is at and do some kind of bridge in between and come up with some plan that feels doable, right?

Because sometimes, for example, I coach the GDRIX gut detox program. Some people might not be ready for the full five weeks of the program, they might be not ready to do a full elimination diet on all the main culprits of potential to verify food sensitivities.

it's important to have that dialogue between providers and coaches too, because we can say, okay, you know what, how about we just do this like a modified version of that, but still get the benefits of having some of those things observed as well as taking the supplements when we're already gonna be started to reduce that inflammation with those beautiful supplements that were designed to do that.

And as we move forward, maybe the patient might get excited, see some benefits coming up, and then they might be more excited to go on further on those eliminations.

Just to give you an example on one specific thing regarding diet, regardless of whatever the suggestion of the care plan is, I believe that it's a matter of like understanding what is possible for that person.

What do they feel safe doing? What feels doable? what feels realistic? Because, you know, it will be ideal in ideal world, really the perfect diet, have plenty of time to exercise, I have a job that doesn't stress us out.

And we have plan your time with our loved ones and everything would be beautiful, but that's not the reality that we live in. So give or take and we'll have to see what are the priorities, what the absolute non-negotiables both for the

patient and the provider and kind of figure out how to create that plan together.

So, it's a more collaborative approach more than it is like, you know, as coaches, we never tell people what to do. People may think that we're not one more provider to be prescribing them a plan.

It's about understanding where they're coming from and trying to work out a strategy together, brainstorming ideas or holding them accountable and then making sure they get what they need to I love that.

So before we get into nervous system tools and how people can reset, activate their vagus nerve at home, I want to talk about what they can expect and what results they see when they consistently, consistency is key everybody, If they're consistently activating their vagus nerve, what kind of benefits can patients expect to see?

You know, the list is endless, but what I can say- No, I love it. Possibilities are endless. However, as a provider who makes sure that every single patient that comes through here and is part of our practice works on their nervous system and vagis nerve as part their overall care plan.

patients start to notice all kinds of things, particularly, again, a little more energy. And it's a slow-boiling frog in the good direction where the more you do it, the most you notice these changes, including increased energy, better sleep, and better digestion.

Again, for the patient that had the immune system dysfunction at MCAS, then the system was starting to regulate weight and metabolism balance because again if your body's dumping cortisol that means it's like we have to survive and I got to hold on to weight in order to just survive that that can be one and some people's stress does lead to unwanted weight loss and so again everybody's different but some People find that when they work on their nervous system their body and Metabolism starts to balance out in a way that is better for them Mental health-wise, people experiencing less burnout, less mood swings, better rates of depression and anxiety.

And even with ADHD, finding that they have better focus. When again, their nervous system and their vagus nerve is regulated. So those are just some of the big category things that I see as a provider.

Yeah. Um, and also people just, they're skin, like they just look more vibrant when, when they regulate it. Thank you, you noticed. It's a regulated nervous I'm sorry, what?

What have you been doing by cleaning the nervous system? I can say that I felt all of that. So I am before we get into the tools, but I, when I was, um, working through burnout, Working with my providers, I started incorporating Vegas nerve consistently daily in the beginning of it.

I Was doing it three to four times a day. Uh, that's just what I needed to do for myself. And I can say that I really started noticing the results around week eight or so, and I just kept on doing it consistently.

But I will say mentally wise, I struggle with depression and anxiety and ADHD. I love my brain. It is chaos up there. And, right. We love her, but I did not know that I could function the way that they do today when I was struggling that bad.

It was, it is night and day where I am. I can say my brain fog is gone. My memory has significantly improved. Well, I, while I going through my journey, was concerned about my mental clarity and my memory.

had gotten to that point where it was so burned out that was like, is there something wrong? My family does have a history of Alzheimer's, cerebral ataxia and things like that.

So I was like, okay, let's be proactive. I ended up having to get a brain MRI due to some labs coming back a little bit wonky. And it came back clear.

As I started working on my vagus nerve, I didn't really change much else. It did a few peptides. Right. to the point where it's like, oh, this is what did it for me.

I really truly think it was rebalancing my nervous system and getting it to a point or like I'm consistently feeling safe, brain fog, fatigue. always has fluctuated throughout my life, but there was also this moment where my face started to lose that puffiness and the inflammation in my.

And my phase started that last five, 10 pounds, even on GLP ones, like just started. To melt off your body truly holds the secrets.

Benefits of Vagus Nerve Regulation

It keeps the score. That is a great book recommendation for anybody. The body keeps a score and I felt like my system was finally releasing trauma held on to whatever, wherever.

So I experienced weight loss. I also was able to get off of all of the hormones that I was on, balancing my hormones. My body was all over the place, hormone-wise also, so I'm no longer on any progesterone or testosterone or anything like that because my body is now able the way that it was meant to work.

I don't get sick as often. When I do get. Sick, I recover so much faster. And back in the gym and I'm recovering from that. So I mean, my success story, II could toot about it all day.

All day, totally. Yeah. here for it. I've been through a similar journey, Amanda, personally, I mean, aside from treating the patients, like I'd been to a similarly journey with that.

So I'm here to second that, and it was the regulating the nervous system and getting that vagus nerve back online that has made the biggest difference by far.

I titrated off of antidepressants because I did have to go on those temporarily to support myself. I was on them for about three months. Started working on my vagus nerve on month two and do not do this without the care or supervision of your providers or anything like that.

But I personally was able to titrate off antidespressant, ADHD medications. And my hormones, because my body was, is able to do the work. I do still do, do work every single day consistently.

And I still have days where I have to. Regulate myself emotionally and mentally, and that is okay because that's the way that I choose to live my life.

Again, everybody don't do anything without your medical providers or your guidance. But the vagus nerve is, I think this is the magic bullet. If you've been struggling without answers, i would certainly give what we're about to talk about a solid try with consistency also.

So let's talk. How to stimulate the Vegas nerve and what people can do and actually works. What do you, how do help patients or what are some of the techniques you use as a health coach to help people activate their Vegas nerf?

So there's a few different ones that come to mind being like the most easier to implement and most basic ones are well accepted. But I would say like, the number one tool to like regulate your nervous system is to start looking at your schedule and like be more realistic.

You never slow down? Slow down. Exactly. Slowing down, it's very underestimated. For example, just to be here on the podcast today, I tweak my schedule so that I would have some extra time so I could mentally prepare for it.

Take a moment to have a little break after lunch. So that kind of like mindfulness around what we are capable of doing versus us constantly pushing ourselves.

It's more of like a mindset shift. I think that's one of the most powerful ones. Um, I mean, also like the second thing I'd say is what the patient is willing to do because it's like, you can tell them 3 million things to, but it talks about

what, what feels more natural, right?

What feels, more intuitive once. So for example, after working with a patient once I suggested some type of breath work, which one of the most research, more evidence-backed, you know, doing longer exhales can really quickly help stimulate your nervous nervous nerve and activate your parasympathetic state.

However, this patient was absolutely horrified because he had someone in the family who was a breathwork coach and absolutely didn't want anything to do with breath work.

So we had to take him out. You do have to meet people where they're at and there's a lot of other apps. No, there's no point in me telling them to meditate, sit down, do different breathing techniques if they're not willing to do it.

So I think the question is what's possible in that person's lifestyle? So you kind of have to engage and figure out where they at. I that's the basic thing.

But just to be specific on what possible things we can say, right? My favorite thing, honestly, is humming. Because I find it very difficult that if you're humming, especially if your humming like a song that you like or some song stuck in your head for whatever reason, displayed on the radio or whatever, it's kind of impossible to be in a bad mood while you are humming.

So personally, I think it is one of my favorites because I thing it has double effect. You stimulate your vagus nerve as well as be uplifting your mood.

I thinks it helps that. creates a kind of like lifestyle, kind relaxation about it. How can you be like in the state of fight or flight if you're humming, you know, doing a chore or while you are cooking something or something in your kitchen, I don't know.

Or we're doing something around the house. So I found that that's my favorite. I mean, of course, breathwork are very, very powerful. There's different techniques.

Some of the ones that most known that are very well used and very researched and effective. The box breathing, which is inhale on the count of four, hold the counter four and exhale on count four.

But I find that one more, it's more useful when you have more like a focus thing. So they say the Marines like to do that. It's like more for focus. If you want to really like, if you're really very activated, you just had like almost like road rage situation, and you really need to calm down fast, I think the four, seven, eight breath can be a better choice.

So inhale on the count of four. Hold on a count seven. But then, you know, any type of just sitting down and doing longer exhales as you breathe, I thing it will already kind of get you there somehow, even intuitively.

It's really whatever the person is willing to do. I like breath work. I used to use breathwork a lot, especially in very targeted areas too. for specific people, right?

You have to meet them where they're at, but I used to do and recommend a lot of breath work as well. The box, the 444, 6-7-8, yep. But why, what is so important?

Because there's a reason that you breathe in, you hold. and you exhale. And there are breathing exercises and intentionally they focus on the exhale being a little bit longer.

So why is the exhalation so important in the breath work? Controlling the exhaling does hit that vagus nerve. If we're in true danger, we are not going to be able to control how long we're exhaling and breathing, right?

Tools to Activate the Vagus Nerve

And whatnot. So when we control that exhale, it does send a signal. Cause again, It's the 80% taking in and it's

like, wait, we were exhailing slowly.

That means we must be safe. And then the vagus nerve can then deliver signals to the cardiovascular system, the digestive system and immune system that, Hey, We can chill.

because clearly we're breathing properly. Again, because that slow exhalation is a signal to the vagus nerve into the brain that we are actually safe.

And I look at that as us walking the dog versus the dogs walking us. It's like taking that small back and it's where we're actually okay. And then that autonomic nervous system is like, okay, we can show.

When you exhale, the vagus nerve signals the heart to slow down. It activates the parasympathetic and promotes relaxation and digestion where the inhale is actually slightly sympathetic.

So the exhale is that parisympathy and when you intentionally go longer, it's sending that signal to your vagus nerve, telling your body, you are safe.

You can relax. It's giving the signal a safety. And it could be different for different people. Some people just sometimes just it is about interrupting the focus.

So doing something creative. whether it's doing some journaling or painting or whatever, for some people could be something like that. Also like connection, like human connection.

Hugging a loved one. All of those things are like things that our bodies will interpret as signals of being safe. And all of these are valid. I think the most important thing is to not let the stress process get overpowering and accumulate.

So I find what I'd like to invite patients to do is look into areas of situations in your life that are particularly stressful and think about how can you causes those chemical compounds that happen, that get triggered in your body so that you don't feel at the end of the day, you're so exhausted and then usually you can sleep better, right?

So whether it's like shaking off, dancing, I mean, gargling, there's so many different ways to go about it. Gargaling, yeah. That was another one. It's a huge one, but it also just like…

Remember too, with the gargling and the humming, the vagus nerve, it goes from your brain stem, right? It is right here, yeah. Right in the back, base of your head, all the way down.

So when you hum, when gargle, kind of it's that vibration that you're creating, budding up against the Vagus nerve. And that's what the Gargaling and The Humming.

sensory, I will say sensory stimulation for the vagus nerve. So humming and gargling are sensory stimulations for. Another one that I think is important for women to proceed with caution is cold exposure, cold plunging therapies.

I do like cold. Yeah. With my hormones and stuff like that. So cold exposure therapy and the vagus nerve. Why does that work? From my understanding, the certain extreme exposures like cold.

can almost shock the body into a parasympathetic state, especially when you're doing things like focusing on your breath and being, it's taking control of the stressor.

So it is not just getting cold, but it also engaging in, you know, specified breathing while being in cold plunges. I've done full plungers. And what can happen is that being in that stressful environment, but going into this extreme state of focus and breathing can then send the body into a parasympathetic state turning on the vagus nerve from that extreme exposure.

And that can happen too with heat as well. That's why they call temperature therapy, whether it's the heat or the cold, is snapping it out of its pattern of being on a fight or flight and allowing that stressor to actually be the tool.

with the proper breathing and mindset to go into a parasympathetic state. But just like Amanda said, it has to be done right and it can work differently for men and women.

From what I know, cold exposure is a controlled stressor and initially activates, like you said the fight or flight. And then it forces your vagus nerve to kick in and calm the body down.

I wouldn't start with cold-exposure therapy. all the other things that we've been talking about the humming gargling box breathing looking at your schedule and just intentionally slowing down because with the cold exposure therapy from what I know about it is you're actually training your nervous system to recover faster from stress so if you don't have that baseline already it's just putting you into fight or flight and you have to stick it out in order to have it so like jumping in and jumping out isn't really going to do anything because step one is really cold shock right you get in your heart spikes your breathing becomes rapid your body perceives a threat and then step two is your vagus response so you consciously slow your slows down your heart rate and it starts helping you recover.

It starts stabilizing your body. If you've ever done a cold plunge, you get in and you are shook. And then a minute in, your breathing and that's your vagus nerve coming in slowing your heartbeat, stabilising your Nervous system regains control and this is nervous system training in real time and it's building resilience.

Not just relaxation, but I do think that you have to work. It's not just something to jump into. In my opinion, it is not something I would do every day and be like, I am activating my vagus nerve.

Yeah, I think it's an advanced tool kind of thing, right? I would say that's for a beginner. It is. But it tries to be when people are doing it without consultations, in my opinion.

Like you can get a cold plunge and you don't even have to get one, just fill your bathtub up with ice, and just jump in. Right. People are just doing and I sometimes think there's a time and a place for it.

I think what we have to be careful of to follow up with that is that that same… adrenaline rush and chase that we talked about earlier. You got to be careful of how people approach their vagus nerve health with that as well, because it can become that really like almost sexy chase of biohacking.

No, it is. There's so many different things out there about it. What they may not realize is happening is they're not doing it properly and it's totally sabotaging what they think they are doing.

I personally don't like it and I find much, if somebody were to consider doing it, I would consider just with a bowl and your face only to start with and then before considering doing their whole body as well.

I was going to say, for myself and when I'm coaching patients on how to activate their vagus nerve, it's really getting back to basics. Yeah. And it is nature.

it's being mindful of how many, how much stimulants you're having in a day between coffee or Adderall or energy drinks and things like that. It's a being Are you doing extreme movement like Iron Man's and doing too much of them are not enough and you're being too sedentary?

And then it's connection and relationships. Like, are you having healthy relationships? Do you feel safe in your closest relationships, can you be yourself in close relationships and people are like, why are we asking this?

You don't feel safe anywhere. Like I, I was in a safe environment, but my body was telling me I wasn't safe and I had to do a lot of work to connect with my environment.

That just takes a lots of personal work also. Yes it does. To make sure that your mind and your body is registering your environment as safe. 100%. And to add to that, that's why I want people to understand to get your vagus nerve primed and to heal your nervous system in that neuroplasticity, which is how the nervous you have this year does not have to be the system you'll have next year.

But to create those new pathways and help break down those old pathways, it takes time. It's like gardening. And so, you're not going to plant a seed and then the next day, usually you don't have this whole big plant with nothing.

You have to look at nervous system work in the same way. It takes patience. And when done right, it is absolutely going take time and consistency. The little things we do every day.

is going to make the biggest difference in the world. So can you go outside for five minutes? Can you journal? If you are one of those really like engineer minded logical mind people, some, for some people those like alpha stim or vaginal nerve stimulator may be a great place to start because it's like, I need data based things versus breath work or journaling.

You know what I mean? Where are you going see? Look, listen, where are we going start and be consistent? How are, how is gonna consistency for rewiring your nervous system when I look for you?

And I think that's one of the most important questions we get. And keep it simple. I'm thinking you said it right too, getting back to the basics, because- Back to basics.

It's everything that stimulates, one, it is slowing down. and I that there's so many lifestyle things that you can do from sun gazing in the morning, putting your feet in grass for grounding, looking at your schedule and putting in areas for intentional rest.

Training, Recovery, and Daily Habits

There's also the basics, like gut health, right? Because if you've got poor gut, health it frigoring the fight or flight response. So even things as at like making sure that your gut is healthy, cause that can impact the vagus nerve also.

I thought you said something really, really good that I wanted to touch on training, Right? You can have a sedentary lifestyle and that. Can be. triggering your fight or flight.

You can also over train and that can be just as detrimental if you consistently over-train and you push yourself into fight-or-flight and your not bouncing back.

You are overtraining. And I see people do this all the time, right? Especially people who are trying to lose weight, like, but I'm working out, and a lot of times they're doing too much.

Like if they start small and they build and build, then they are like I want these aggressive results, so I am going to do it harder and I will go to the gym even more.

Then they get frustrated. because they're not eating the results. Also, under-eating could be a major stressor for the bodies, but you know, in the context of weight loss, I mean, it seems counterintuitive.

People think that if they eat less or eat last meals or skip meals, that they are going to have better results, and then the body just perceives that as stress and holds on to the weight.

100%. How do you if you're overtraining? What's the balance between pushing yourself and regulating your nervous system? Ooh, that's a great question.

Some signs that you might be over training are working out, but holding onto visceral belly fat and, you know, feeling inflamed and you're like, That's weird because I'm doing all the right things.

So that could be the body sign of like you are overdoing it. In the end on the flip side, I am training, But I can't put on muscle. Like I can't, I'm trying to be more defined.

I don't want to necessarily be real thin, but I want be putting on muscle. Well, if you're in survival, your body's not

going to build muscle as effectively I should say.

So those are some signs. And then on restful sleep, you wake up tired. even though you're getting a full eight hours. And you are like, okay, that's strange.

Brain fog, could be feeling anxious or depressed, or it could noticing other small signs like your skin's off or you losing hair and your nails look weak and brittle.

That could a sign, again, you under reserved and you over training. So those are some things that I talk to people about who are actively training and they're, you know, otherwise pretty healthy, but they are like, my body's off balance and I can't figure out why that is.

That could be your body starting to whisper, hey, your overdoing it. Yeah. Also, I think it's important to empower patients and encourage them to create a connection with how they feel, for example, after a workout.

So is that workout supportive? I mean, how do they after doing it? Are they completely depleted, exhausted, spent, take like three, four days to recover, or is it something that they're like, do it and feel great that makes them feel energized and feels good?

So I that's also another very important sign to read, and it takes a little bit starting to create that awareness and contact with yourself, right? 100%. Well, I want to thank you guys so much for today's podcast.

Before we close, have one final question for each of you. So, Erica, my closing question Are devices and supplements necessary from a practitioner standpoint to help regulate the nervous system?

The short answer is no. And the longer answer, is they can be beneficial, but it needs to be tailored to the patient. But in order to get a regulated nervous, system that is completely free of charge.

And it's more, again, the input we're giving that 80% around in our environment, our thoughts and our habits. That is going to make the biggest difference.

I cannot out supplement, out device, or out peptide your habits, your thoughts, and your, then no one can. All right. Renata, my final question for you is what are your top three daily habits for improving vague, vagal tone?

I would say my favorite three, I'd say start the day after you brush your teeth gargle. do a very good gargle. And then I like to stack a few habits, a cute mini habits like going outside for a little bit of circadian rhythm regulation, getting that light exposure first thing in the morning.

I think it'd be a great way to like send the right signals for your nervous system. Oh, I would like do that while I'm grounding as well as having a slow breakfast.

Don't eat in a hurry, take a breath before eating. So that's kind of like my beautiful way of starting the day. that could be done and it doesn't take more than five, 10 minutes.

I love that. That's great. Thank you for sharing. Thank you so much. We'll see you next week. Thank for joining us on the Forum Health Integrative Medicine podcast.

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