Uncover The Role Of Your Neck In Trauma Healing Transcript

(Transcripts are generated by AI and may contain errors)

Introduction to the vagus nerve and trauma states

Welcome to this interview. on the Biology of Trauma Summit 3.0, we were talking about the trauma disease connection and today's conversation around not just the vagus nerve, but the whole ecosystem of the vagus nerve.

This is going to be a fascinating talk. And what stands out to me that you need to know going into this talk is around the vagus nerve and which state of the autonomic nervous system are we talking about?

So let's back that up, because the autonomic nervous system is where the trauma patterns get stored. They don't just get stored in our brain, right? The trauma becomes our biology, not just our psychology.

So understanding how that actually happens is very much a part of this conversation today with the vagus nerve. There are actually two states of the vagus nerve, so many people are familiar with the parasympathetic or what we call the ventral vagal state, which is very much the social engagement hopping.

That's where you are right now. Rest and Digest is another word for that. And that is when we are. How I describe it is calm aliveness. That's why the tagline for my 21 day journey is that journey to calm aliveness.

How can we work with repair those patterns of trauma in our body to get them out of these other states that I'll talk about in just a second and get them into this parasympathetic state of the vagus nerve by doing exercises that connect in specific ways to our body, and then we have this other state of the vagus nerve, and that is actually the trauma response.

It's called the dorsal vagal response. If you're familiar with the polyvagal theory, if you're not, definitely listen to Dr. Steven Porges talk on this.

And that is the state where our body has shut down and it communicates all that through the vagus nerve. And I'm touching my neck because that's where the vagus nerve travels so that we really can see that this vagus nerve comes out of our brainstem, comes down behind our ears, down our neck.

That is what is communicating to our body, what state it should be in. Should it be in this calm, alive state or should it be in the shutdown, complete shutdown mode?

So let me show you an image, because this will help you understand the biology that we're talking about with the trauma response. So here are the three states of the nervous system, and we're talking about the autonomic nervous system, specifically, not the central nervous system.

The neck as the bottleneck for healing

That's your brain brainstem. This is your autonomic nervous system. And you have the two states of vagus that I talked about here, your parasympathetic, there's your calm aliveness.

And then we have the dorsal vagus. And so this is the trauma response. Now, how do we get to that trauma response? Let me show you exactly how we get there.

So in this image, we see the pathway to that trauma response. Let's say we're starting our day in parasympathetic social engagement and we've got that trigger that happens.

Oh, my goodness. The trigger. And it puts us into a state of sympathetic. This is where we have very high energy. This is where you may start sweating.

This is where you feel restless. You have the hamster wheel thoughts. You may have anger. There is a very high energy state, the sympathetic state. Now, what happens is that when we are not able to take action, when we are not able to take action either, because and here are the two triggers for that trauma response.

Too much, too fast, too little for too long. We're not able to take action. Our autonomic nervous system shifts in its state, and it actually goes to the trauma response, which is the dorsal vagal state.

So this is still being communicated through the vagus nerve. But now what it's communicating is not the calm aliveness, not the safety, not the security.

It's actually communicating overwhelming to our whole body, to the cells and all systems of our body or digestive system, our immune system. And so we will feel exhausted, heavy, depressed, have thoughts of what's the point.

So I do teach a whole master class on this three states of our nervous system and the essential sequence, because here is going to be our roadmap to come back out of this trauma response.

And this is what I lead people through in the 21 day journey, because the trauma response needs a very specific tool. The sympathetic state needs a very specific tool, and the parasympathetic needs a very different tool because they are very different states of our autonomic nervous system.

I hope that this has made sense and I also teach a whole masterclass on this so you can look for that as well. And to go into this conversation now around the vagus nerve and what happens as it's traveling in the neck is my good friend Jodi Cohen joining me for this conversation.

Now, Jodi is a bestselling author, award winning journalist, functional medicine practitioner and founder of Vibrant Blue Oils, where she is combined her training in nutritional therapy and aroma therapy to create unique proprietary blends of organic and wild crafted essential oils.

And she has been studying the vagus nerve for some time. She has a blend that specific for the parasympathetic state actually, and promotes that safety as we can directly access the vagus nerve coming through the neck here.

But today's conversation is going to be very different because it's not just the vagus nerve, it's all of these other tissues. And then in the neck that are affecting that communication pathway in the vagus nerve that I just talked about.

So let's jump into this interview and learn something about our vagus nerve and the ecosystem in our neck. All right, Jodi, you've been working with the vagus nerve for a long time.

And I love that you continue to learn and figure out the better ways that we can even come in and work with the vagus nerve, heal the vagus nerve, bring it to regulation.

So I know you've been working on some new stuff with the vagus nerve around. Hey, it's not just the vagus nerve in the neck, like there's a lot of other stuff that's happening in the neck.

So talk to us about what you've been working on lately and what you've been learning lately. We know one thing that really struck me is the idea that the bottleneck to healing is really the neck. Right?

Because when we heal, we need to heal the brain and we need to heal the body. And what is it that allows us to get good things into the brain and bad things to get out of the brain, the neck?

And it's really you know, it's got a lot going on. It's got the structure.

Releasing fascia and lymph to improve vagus signaling

It's got the nerves, like the vagus nerve. It's got circulation. It's got lymph, it's got fascia. And all of these things are

happening at once. And imagine, you know, I just got back from an airplane trip and I was in the middle between two normal sized people and I could barely hold my book.

You know, if your fascia is, you know, inflamed or congested or, you know, your lymph is not flowing and inflamed, all of a sudden the vagus nerve is getting squeezed and it isn't allowed to signal and function as optimally as it can.

So it's almost like, you know, or even think of a garden, you know, if one plant is invading the other plants, space, it doesn't give it the sunlight, it doesn't give it the moisture, the ecosystem of the neck.

We need to support everything to ensure optimal vagus nerve signaling. So I've been looking at kind of making sure that lymph is draining and fascia is less constricted, you know, and circulation is flowing.

And, you know, I work with essential oils because that's another thing. You know, there are so many remedies that we can ingest that are amazing. But sometimes you really need to topically apply something.

And especially with lymph, because it's so delicate and you know, where the main point of the lymph is kind of right on the clavicle is like around the collarbone and, you know, just helping to unpack that whole, you know, ecosystem and make sure that it's functioning optimally so that the vagus nerve has kind of the space and the potential to really shift into parasympathetic and let you feel safe and kind of unpack the trauma.

So here's what's really fascinating about this is we know from early childhood that if an infant even starts to feel overwhelmed for whatever reason, right, just overwhelmed, they will actually start to have bracing patterns around their neck.

Shoulders may actually come up and we see a lot of adults walking around on their shoulders. Right. Yes. So so this neck thing is exactly a way also to control how much information we're getting from our body through the vagus nerve.

And it can happen in a very subconscious way that it just is the bracing patterns that have been there since early, early childhood, because at that time, that was likely one of your only mechanisms in order to not feel all of that awfulness and overwhelmed that your body was going through an almost kind of disconnect in a way to help you survive.

And so I'm thinking that especially someone who might have those early bracing patterns, that that would have already just set the fashion, set the limp up to be tight, to be tends to be inflamed so that then as a person is now an adult and their life has changed, but yet their neck, the ecosystem of their neck has not changed.

And so they don't have as many healing opportunities because that that communication pathway is still blocked off. Yes. Well, that was me, too. Like for anyone who's listening, who like heart opening and yoga, that's uncomfortable.

You know why? Because you're bracing. And it impacts relationships, too, because when you can't kind of extend an open, it's harder to receive love and to let good things into your life.

And so that's why I'm obsessed with fashion release. I actually created a fashion blend that I, I have it in a roller bottle because I use it so often.

But just putting it on the back of the neck, the back of the heart, just allowing, you know, you can also do fashion work, which is basically like gentle pressure and heat and time, but just allowing yourself to kind of open and have movement because once you can move physically, it helps you to move the emotions, too.

And so I'm imagining this being a big part of someone's toolkit. Yes. Their trauma healing journey, because it's as they're they are wanting to open up, as they are now wanting to let those bracing patterns release, being able to safely feel they don't want to do it too fast, and yet they do want to promote the ability to move in that into that direction.

Stimulating safety through the vagus nerve

And so as they're doing other things and I love that movement piece, that's a big piece of what we do, especially with the somatic experience in bringing in movement and being able to support the tissues to allow that process to be happening on a tissue level, not just on an emotional level.

Well, no, and that's exactly what it is. You know, you can't drink from the fire hose. Right. And it's much more like, you know, that that's why I like oils, because they that you can just smell it.

And it's like having a little, you know, a little cry, a little emotional experience. When I, I love yoga. Sometimes I cry in yoga, you know, and it's like downward dog is the best time to cry because no one can really see you, but you can kind of like breathe it out, release it and then go back to you.

Don't need to get stuck in it. And so being stuck like that to me talks a lot about the ecosystem in there is getting, getting stuck. And you started the talk with kind of that idea that this can be the bottleneck.

It it is the bottleneck. I mean, if you think about it like, okay, let's say that the neck is congested or even the clavicles, like if the lymph if the fluid is stuck here, think about a traffic jam.

Right. You know, the accident could be a mile ahead, but the traffic backs up if there's congestion here, the lymph can't flow. So it lingers on the thyroid chakra.

You know, we all have thyroid issues or even the metabolic waste or any pathogens or amalgam, you know, debris, metals, they can't drain. So they stay too long in the brain.

And then what happens? The immune system in the brain responds to the toxins that shouldn't be there. We have inflammation. We experience things like fatigue, you know, brain fog, pain, all of these things that are kind of caused by if we could just allow the garbage to drain out the immune system, wouldn't need to be as active.

Mm hmm. So how would that process be for someone? Say, someone has never used essential oils at all. Right? Now they're hearing, okay, essential oils might be in my toolkit.

And where would they start in order to safely start just the lymph and the fascia and the neck? We actually have a vagus nerve kit that has the three blends, lymph fascia and parasympathetic, and we have them in roller bottles to make them even easier.

I'm going to demonstrate with actual bottles and this is lymph. And the most important point, if you hear nothing else this point above your clavicles, you can even kind of feel with me and just kind of gently massage if it feels a little tender or a little uncomfortable, that's just information.

So no big deal. It's just telling you, you know, we're just going to kind of work on it. It's like for for anyone who has long hair, children with long hair and, you know, tangles, sometimes you just gently comb through with a knot and, you know, it's not going to be there permanently.

But that's really the most important point. And then you can kind of graduate to just really gentle. The lymph is gentle strokes, you know, up to the shoulders.

A lot of times people have what our friend Kelly Kennedy calls not armpits but arm puffs. So if you if you're under your arm is like a little tender, you know, just kind of gently allowing yourself to feel where you might be tender and unravel that with lymph.

And so once you kind of open up that big area, then you are going to move on to the neck and you can use both lymph on and faster and you're just going to kind of gently allow drainage down the neck.

You can do it when you're on the phone. You can do it if you're stuck in traffic waiting in line, just really gently

making sure that everything can drain down.

And then the final step, which is where I kind of started, is stimulating your vagus nerve. And we can explain kind of why stimulating the vagus nerve helps to activate the safety gauge, the parasympathetic nervous system.

But there is a surgical implant. This neuroscientist named Kevin Tracy started surgically implanting a pacemaker like device here to electrically signal the vagus nerve.

It's been approved by the FDA for epilepsy, migraines and depression. You can also stimulate it with acupuncture, needles and some devices. Or I just like oil, the stimulatory oil.

It's clove and lime and carry it in your pocket and just applying it kind of helps to send that signal. But what's happening when you kind of prep things, you know, you prep the meal before you cook, so you save time now when you're kind of helping the body shift into that safety gauge, that parasympathetic gauge.

And it's now safe to detoxify, it's safe to eliminate toxins. You know, if you were to just turn it on and you hadn't kind of opened the neck channel, all of a sudden the brain's like, Oh, great, you know, we can dump things, and then you run into this bottleneck or this traffic jam, and then sometimes you have, you know, you maybe get a headache or you don't feel great.

Now it ensures that when you kind of turn on safety and the body is like, okay, I'm going to switch into healing mode, everything else is in healing mode too.

So they all works together. And being in that parasympathetic like that really is the healing mode. It's not going to happen in any other state of the nervous system.

It's really that parasympathetic where the healing has the space, has the time, has the energy to do that. So yeah, let's talk a little bit about how to bring in more of that safety through the vagus nerve and where they might be able to directly access that vagus nerve as it's going through the neck and all the points.

Yeah, and I'm sure you talk about this a lot in the summit, but, you know, everyone knows your nervous system is designed to keep you alive, right? Your autonomic nervous system controls your automatic functions, your breathing, your heart rate, you know, your digestion, your detoxification, your immune system.

And when it senses danger and that can be both a physical danger, a historic danger that you're reliving trauma.

Layering tools for trauma healing and closing remarks

You know, if your village burned down because of fire, if you smell fire, you are going to get proactive or any anticipatory danger. You know, like I think COVID was everyone was afraid that they might get sick or their relative.

They're completely healthy. But the potential exists that something bad could happen. And because your brain can't differentiate between actual physical danger and anticipatory danger, you go into that survival state where resources are allocated towards survival.

Your heart rate speeds up, it pumps blood towards your arms and your legs. So you can either fight back or flee. You're breathing quickens. All of these things turn on to ensure your survival and everything not critical to survival in that moment, like digesting your food, detoxifying, you know, turning on your immune system, reproducing kind of get put on the back burner, you know, that's if it's not on fire, you know, you're not paying attention to it.

And so that is the sympathetic branch of your nervous system, the fight or fight. And ideally, what happens like what happens to animals in the wild, you know, the gazelle sees the lion, it outruns it, it's safe, it lies down, it shakes.

And that's, I think, where your movement comes in. And it basically by shaking, recalibrates and kind of shifts into

that safety parasympathetic state.

Humans sadly don't do that. So we walk around being stressed all the time. And what's interesting is in the human body, it is the vagus nerve, cranial nerve number ten.

Not what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas, but vague U. S. That is the gearshift between fight and flight and safety. Sympathetic parasympathetic. So it's really the information superhighway connects the brain to the body.

Body to the brain, you know, communicates in both directions, starts at the back of the neck, split and is most accessible behind the earlobe. Kind of if you feel behind your earlobe, that is your mastoid bone.

That is where it is the thickest and the most accessible to the surface. From there, it widens to your throat, your heart, your lungs, every organ of digestion and detoxification.

This is why things like humming, you know, calming your heart rate, breathing techniques, all of these wonderful things that I'm sure you teach that help us feel better.

One of the reasons it's helping us feel better is it's stimulating our vagus nerve and putting us into that parasympathetic state when we do feel better.

And so I just there are many ways to do it and you know, I, I do hum. In addition to this, I do breathing practices. I just kind of feel like I'm a fan of layering.

So like if someone said to me, I think I want to lose weight, I'm maybe I'm going to exercise or, you know, change my diet, eat more vegetables and like do both, you know, like layer everything on.

So that's one reason I use the oils because it's just another way to kind of non-invasively easily stimulate and it engages your senses, which I'm sure you do too.

You know, when you can smell something, it's just another way to kind of, you know, Pavlovian signal, like, Oh, okay, I'm safe, I can calm down. Yeah.

So a big part of somatic experiencing and what I bring into the 21 day journey are the orienting and orienting. Using all of our senses. So I actually walk them through what do you smell, stressing the importance of putting things in your environment that when you smell them, they indicate safety to you.

They will give your body that message of We are safe right now. There's no monsters in the room, under the table, behind the couch right here, right now. I am safe.

The other thing that that I've learned from somatic experiencing is the voodoo exercise. And it's it's like a combination. It's almost almost like if you combined humming and a breathing technique together and it actually brings in vibration into the throat.

And so I'm seeing how even that would be a wonderful tool that layered on would be able to activate that vagus nerve and start to release some of the fascia and get maybe the lymph flowing just with the vibration that happens with this breathing in and humming with the view exercise.

I love that. Yeah, it's great. I mean, it's, you know, the more ways you can kind of chipping away at the iceberg, right? The more people that are chipping away and more tools you have, the faster you can get the results you're seeking.

And yet, I don't think that many people think about movement, especially movement in their neck as being a part of the trauma healing journey. And yet what you're saying is that know, like this is actually a big part of it.

And the more that we can come in and support that and safely bring in movement, then it will actually help

accelerate the trauma healing journey overall.

When even for people who are a little immobilized, you know, everyone can kind of gently massage their clavicles and their neck. It's a great place to start, you know?

And so starting with actually what we teach is starting with safety is the most important thing and that we actually can't layer on additional modality and work more some of the more advanced work and how we have that foundation of safety in.

So what an important conversation to have around that safety and here is how to build in that safety with thinking of the ecosystem of the neck. Yes, well said.

When we understand that trauma becomes our biology, not just our psychology, it changes everything. And I want to equip you with tools. So knowing that bringing in safety, that has to be our foundation.

And there are ways that we can do that and we even need to bring in safety in a safe way. Imagine that. And also remember that with the tools that you can equip yourself with.

One of the tools is purchasing all of the recordings for this summit, if that would be helpful to you. So you can have access to this information at any time moving forward that you would like.

I'm your host, Dr. Aimie, and thank you for joining me for this interview on The Biology of Trauma Summit 3.0, and I look forward to seeing you on the next interview.