

The Vagus Nerve

- The vagus nerve conveys threatening “gut feelings to the brain”.
- Vagus nerve is known as the “wandering nerve” because it has multiple branches that diverge from two thick stems rooted in the cerebellum and brainstem that wander to the lowest viscera of your abdomen touching your heart and most major organs along the way.
- “Gut instincts” coming up to the brain via the vagus nerve are linked to different responses to fear.
- The vagus nerve is constantly sending updated sensory information about the state of the body’s organs up to your brain via afferent nerves.
- Afferent signals are sent from a nerve receptor into the brain while efferent signals are sent from the brain to the peripheral body.
- Messages also travel down from your conscious mind through the vagus nerve signaling your organs to create an inner-calm so you can “rest-and-digest” during times of safety, or to prepare your body for “fight-or-flight” in dangerous situations.
- Healthy vagus nerve communication between your gut and your brain helps to slow you down like the brakes on your car by using neurotransmitters such as acetylcholine and GABA.
- These neurotransmitters literally lower heart rate, blood pressure, and help your heart and organs slow down so that you can rest-and-digest.
- Using positive self-talk and taking deep breaths is a quick and easy way to engage the vagus nerve and parasympathetic nervous system to calm yourself from both the top-down and bottom-up.
- Stimulation of the vagus nerve might be able to speed up the process by which people with PTSD can learn to reassociate a nonthreatening stimuli which triggers anxiety with a neutral and non-traumatic experience.
- Vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) is currently used to treat epilepsy and depression.
- Gut feelings are referred to as interoceptive sensations.
- Interoception is the ability to sense physiological signals originating inside your body, such as heart rate, temperature, hunger, pain, irritable bowel, etc.
- Oftentimes, a gut feeling is the first feedback your mind gets when making an emotional decision of conducting a ‘cost-benefit analysis’ of the pros and cost of a particular decision.
- Vagusstoff (acetylcholine) is like a calming tranquilizer that can be self-administer through deep diaphragmatic breathing.
- Anytime you are feeling anxious, simply taking a few deep breaths with long, slow exhales will engage the vagus nerve and trigger a calming parasympathetic response.
- Consciously tapping into the power of your vagus nerve can create a state of inner peace while also taming your inflammation reflex.
- Deep diaphragmatic breathing—with a long, slow exhale—is key to stimulating the vagus nerve and slowing heart rate and blood pressure, especially in times of performance anxiety.