



A GENTLE GUIDE

6 Vagal Toning Exercises for Nervous System Regulation

Small ways to feel safer, faster

THE MINDFUL MUM PDA

What is vagal toning?

The vagus nerve is a long nerve that runs from your brain through your body. It plays a big part in your body's calming response, which is why it's sometimes called the "calming nerve".

When your brain senses a threat, your body shifts into protection mode: fight, flight, freeze or fawn. These are all ways your nervous system tries to keep you safe. They're normal, but they can leave you feeling stuck once the danger has passed.

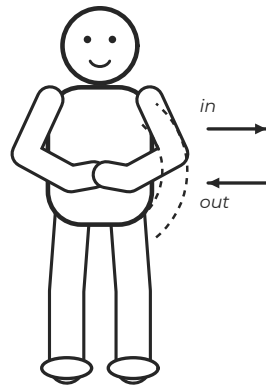
When that happens, it's hard to think your way back to calm, because the thinking part of your brain is harder to reach. Many people find it easier to start with the body, and to feel their way back.

Here are six physical things to try when you notice you're overwhelmed. Vagal toning is a popular approach, and research on it is still developing, so treat these as gentle things to try, not a treatment.

How to use this guide

- Choose one exercise to try, not all six.
- Keep it small. A few breaths or a few seconds is enough.
- Stop if anything feels uncomfortable or makes you feel worse.

1 Breathing

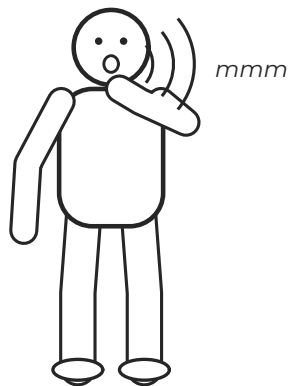


- Longer exhales: breathe in through your nose for 4, add one short sniff in at the top, then breathe out slowly through your mouth.
- Box breathing: breathe in for 4, hold for 4, breathe out for 4, hold for 4. Repeat.

TIP

Make your exhale longer than your inhale.

2 Sound and Vibration

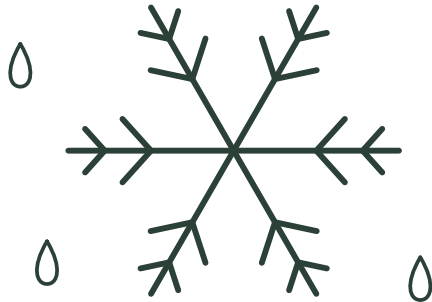


- Humming, chanting or "om"ing.
- Gargling with water.
- Singing, especially long, held notes.

TIP

Low, steady sounds that you can feel in your chest and throat tend to work best.

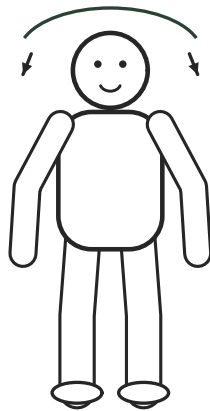
3 Cold Exposure



- Splash cold water on your face.
- Try a cool or cold shower, even for just 30 seconds.

Cold isn't right for everyone. If you have a heart condition or high blood pressure, are pregnant or aren't sure, check with your GP first, or stick to splashing your face.

4 Movement

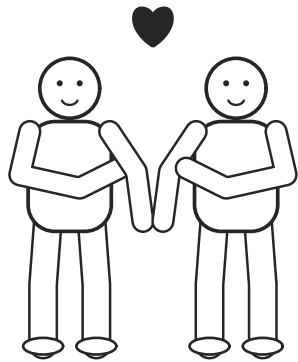


- Gentle neck stretches and slow head rolls.
- Shaking: stand up and shake out your whole body.
- Swinging: swing your arms, or rock gently from side to side.

TIP

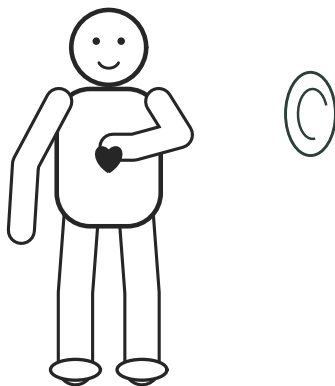
While you do the neck stretches, look around the room and name things that bring you joy, like the sky, books or blankets.

5 Social and Connection



- Eye contact and warm conversation. Find your safe person and tell them that's what you need.
- Laughter. Put on your safe TV show that makes you laugh.
- Being held, or giving or receiving a long hug. If there's no one around, wrap your own arms around yourself.

6 Body Based



- Place a hand on your heart and breathe slowly.
- Gentle ear massage (a branch of the vagus nerve runs near the ear).
- Yawning, real or even faked. A faked yawn often turns into a real one.

Which will you try today?

Pick one. Notice how it feels. You don't have to do them all, and you don't have to get it right.

☐ **Breathing**

How it felt: _____

☐ **Sound and vibration**

How it felt: _____

☐ **Cold exposure**

How it felt: _____

☐ **Movement**

How it felt: _____

☐ **Social and connection**

How it felt: _____

☐ **Body based**

How it felt: _____

A gentle note

These are gentle ideas, not medical treatment, and research on vagal toning is still developing. Please stop anything that feels uncomfortable or makes you feel worse. If you have a heart condition, high blood pressure, are pregnant or aren't sure about something, check with your GP first. If you're struggling or have thoughts of harming yourself, call Samaritans on 116 123 (UK), call or text 988 (US), or call 999 (UK) or 911 (US) in an emergency.