

Reset Your Nervous System: 5 Vagal Brake Exercises You Can Do Anywhere



19 Free Practices

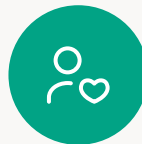
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Stress isn't a flaw in your wiring; it is the wiring. The **vagal brake** is your body's built-in pedal for slowing the stress response back down. Five simple practices, no equipment, anywhere you need them.



What is the vagal brake?

The vagal brake is the way your vagus nerve gently slows your autonomic nervous system, reducing the effects of the stress response such as a racing heart and shallow breath. Activating it lets your body return to calm after stress or anxiety.



Why it matters

A well-functioning vagal brake regulates your stress response and supports emotional resilience. Activating the vagus nerve shifts you from tension toward balance

- lowering anxiety, reducing blood pressure, and supporting healing over time.

Four signs your vagal brake is working

What to notice in your own body after a few minutes of practice.

Heart rate slows

Breath deepens

Shoulders soften

Mind settles

How to activate your vagus nerve

Five practices to reach for. Start with one. Notice what shifts.



01. Deep, slow breathing

1. Sit or lie comfortably. One hand on your chest, the other on your stomach.
2. Inhale through the nose for 4 counts, letting your belly rise (not your chest).
3. Hold the breath for 4 counts.
4. Exhale slowly through the mouth for 6 counts, feeling the belly fall.
5. Repeat for 5–10 minutes, notice the calm as the brake engages.

Duration 5–10 min • Best for: Daily reset, before bed

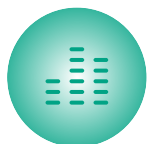
Please note: If the hold feels uncomfortable, skip it and extend the exhale instead.



02. Sighing or audible exhale

1. Inhale deeply through your nose for 4 counts.
2. Exhale audibly through the mouth with a sigh, letting tension leave with the sound.
3. Picture any tightness melting away with the breath.
4. Repeat 3–5 times, feeling lighter with each sigh.

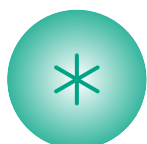
Duration 1–2 min • Best for: Stress in the moment



03. Humming or chanting

1. Close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose.
2. Hum a low note as you exhale, letting the sound resonate in throat and chest.
3. Continue for 5–10 breaths, feeling body and mind slow down.
4. In a private space, experiment with different pitches or a soothing word.

Duration 3–5 min • Best for: Stuck or anxious energy

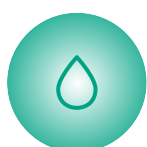


04. Cold exposure

1. Fill a basin with cold water, or soak a washcloth.
2. Submerge your face for a few seconds, or press the cold cloth around your eyes and jawline.
3. The cold activates the dive reflex through the vagus nerve, calming the body quickly.
4. Repeat for 1–2 minutes, noticing how the stress level drops.

Duration 1–2 min • Best for: Acute panic or rumination

Please note: avoid this exercise if you have a cardiovascular condition, Raynaud's syndrome, or cold urticaria. If you are unsure, consult your doctor before trying cold exposure.



05. Gargling water

1. Fill a glass with cool or lukewarm water (not too hot or cold).
2. Stand or sit relaxed; take a sip, tilt your head back, and gargle for 10–15 seconds.
3. If holding the gargle is hard, do shorter bursts: 5 seconds, swallow, repeat.
4. Take a breath. Repeat the cycle 3–5 times, or until you feel a sense of calm.
5. Notice the warming, soothing sensation in the throat as the vagus engages.

Duration 2–3 min • Best for: Tightness in the throat or chest

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