Vagal Nerve Stimulation

The vagal nerve begins at the base of the brain and tracks throughout the upper torso

connecting all the major organs (the word vagus comes from the Greek word, *wandering*). The vagus nerve is the main contributor of the parasympathetic nervous system. It's the longest of 12 cranial nerves and is sometimes called the "information superhighway". Historically, the vagus has been studied as an efferent nerve and as an antagonist of the sympathetic nervous system. It sends a signal to slow your heart rate and lower your blood pressure telling your body it's time to relax. It influences your mood, immune and digestive systems.

The most important function of the vagus nerve is bringing information of the inner organs, such as gut, liver, heart, and lungs to the brain. This suggests that the inner organs are major sources of sensory information to the brain.

<u>Tip:</u> Using the tip of the tongue reach to the back of the roof of the mouth where the surface starts to feel soft. This soft palate area lies directly under the nerve and gives some insight into why the simple techniques below will actually stimulate the vagal nerve.

- **Gaggle (water)**
- **Hum**
- **Sing**
- **Chew gum**

One of the main ways that you can stimulate the healthy function of the vagus nerve is through deep, slow belly breathing.

<u>Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth remembering to:</u>

1. **Breathe more slowly (aim for six breaths per minute).**
2. **Breathe more deeply, from the belly. Think about expanding your abdomen and widening your rib cage as you inhale.**
3. **Exhale longer than you inhale. It's the exhale that triggers the relaxation response.**

In addition, the things below will also stimulate the vagal nerve.

- **splashing the face with cold water**
- **Cold water face immersion: immerse your forehead eyes and at least 2/3 of both cheeks into cold water. If you continue the immersion for 20 seconds you'll trigger what is known as the Diver's Reflex. Alternatively, use a cold washer. Putting it on the back of the neck works but will take longer (say 15 minutes).**
- **Foot massage: gentle or firm touch (self hug)**
- **taking a cold shower**
- **eating some probiotics to stimulate the nerve in the gut**
- **putting your index fingers behind each ear and rubbing up and down**
- **Laughter / music**
- **Pressuring the nail bed of the thumb finger between two fingers of the other hand for a one minute for relief of stress, anxiety and winding down for sleep. (Youtube)** **Dr Mandell's Nail Pinch**

Add to the list and explore further techniques with your therapist that suit your thinking and lifestyle habits: Check out https://youtu.be/AMNb3DZb0_Q by YogaBody.

- **exercise /meditation /prayer**
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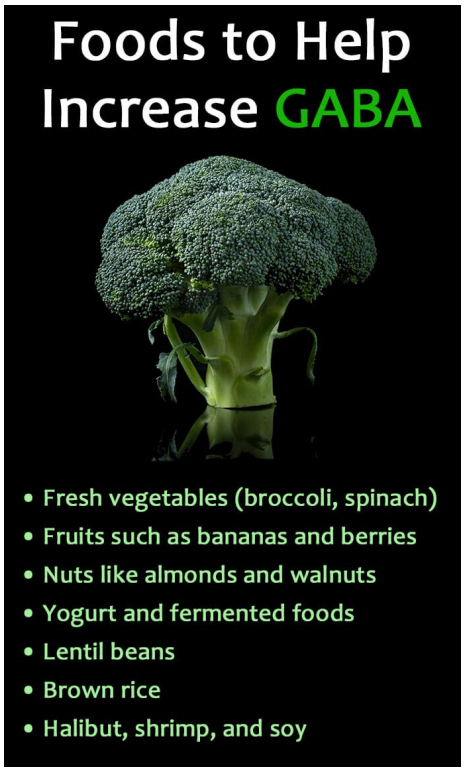
These hacks will also quieten the overthinking mind or what is sometimes called "Monkey Mind".

And yes, it can happen to us all as we get wound up and start producing hormones like cortisol and adrenalin in our body.

GABA or Gamma Aminobutyric Acid on the otherhand acts on our mind like the brakes on a car, helping us achieve a safe thinking speed.

HACK: If 18 years of age; one glass of wine releases GABA and its soothing effect on the limbic region of our brain is felt rather quickly. Caution: Just the one!!