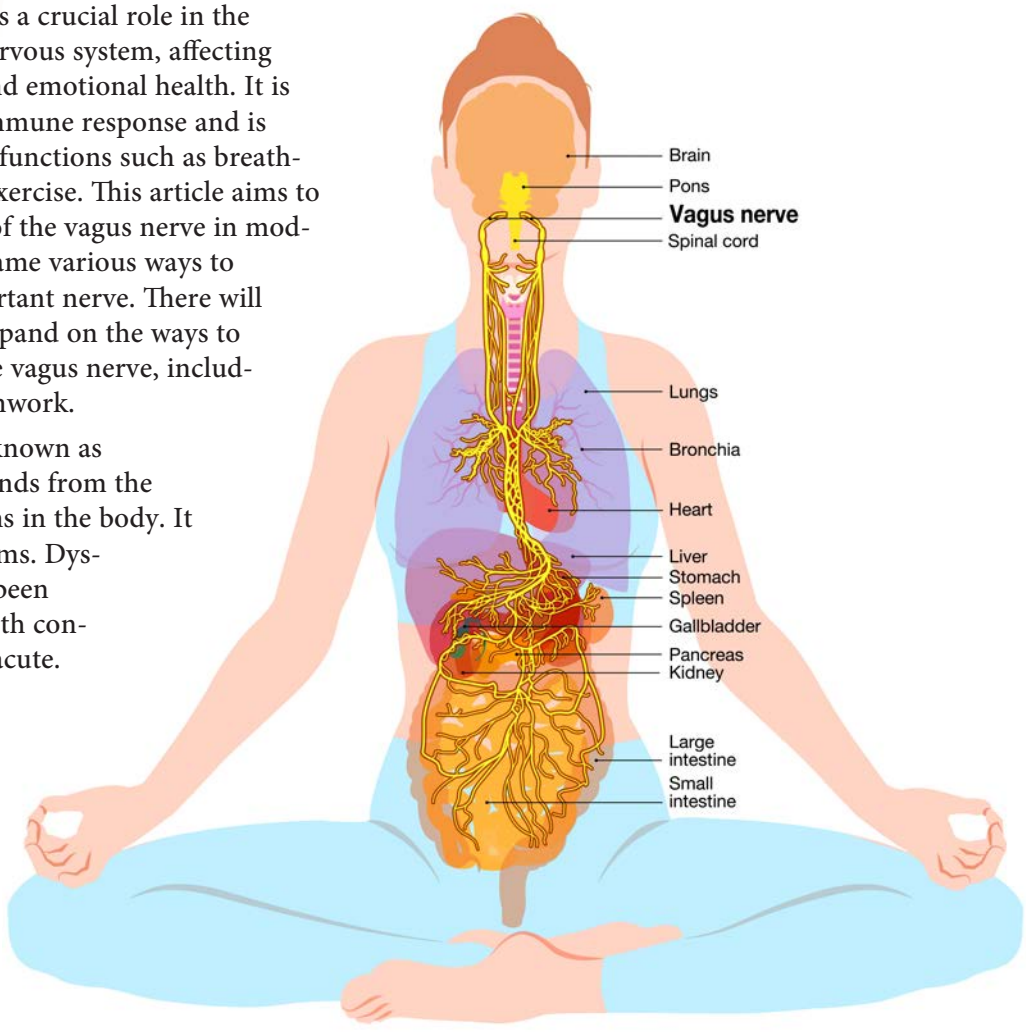
THE VAGUS NERVE—

Crystal Maceira, CBP, LMT, MH

How Crucial Is It to Your Health? *PART 1*

The vagus nerve plays a crucial role in the parasympathetic nervous system, affecting physical, mental, and emotional health. It is associated with a strong immune response and is involved in various bodily functions such as breathing, digestion, sleep, and exercise. This article aims to highlight the significance of the vagus nerve in modern health concerns and name various ways to strengthen this most important nerve. There will be a follow-up article to expand on the ways to strengthen and activate the vagus nerve, including Breathwork and Bowenwork.



The vagus nerve, also known as "the wanderer nerve," extends from the brainstem to various organs in the body. It controls many major systems. Dysfunction of this nerve has been linked with numerous health conditions, both chronic and acute. Learning about the vagus nerve can provide valuable insights into achieving better overall health.

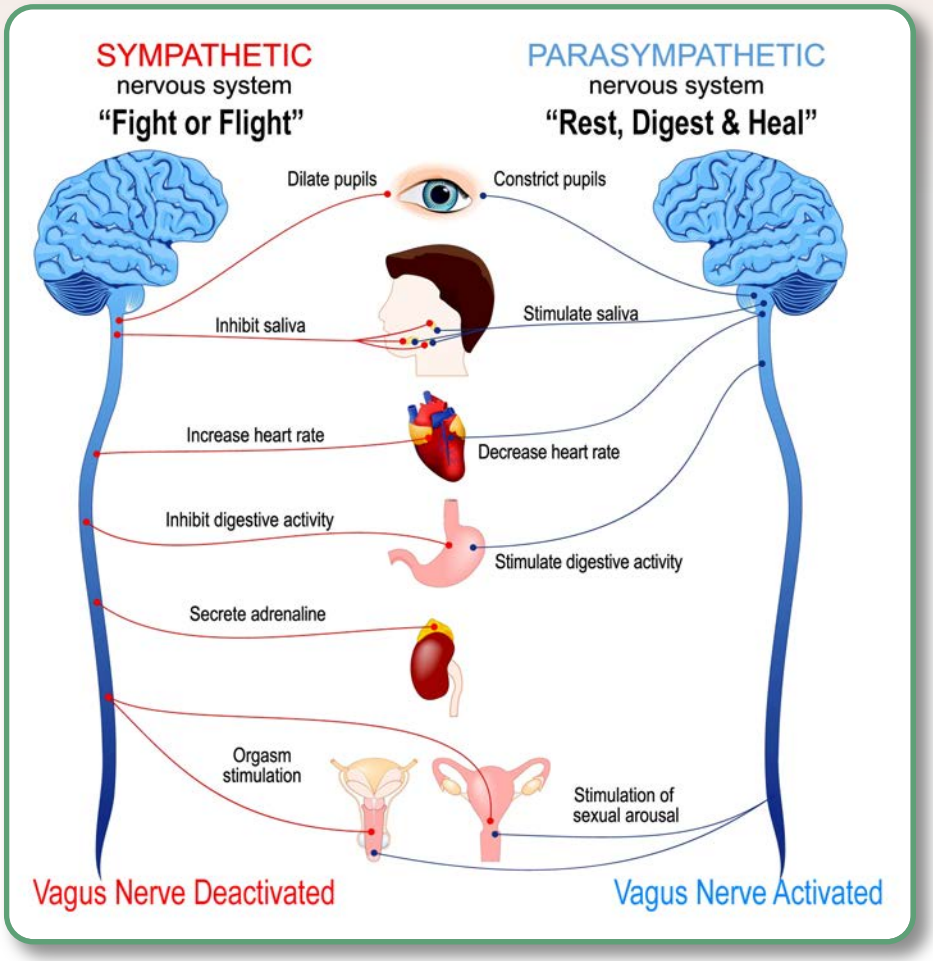
The vagus nerve is the most extensive network of nerve fibers in our Central Nervous System (CNS), traveling throughout the body. The vagal ganglia are responsible for controlling the efferent vagal fibers (conducting signals *FROM* the Central Nervous System), while the Dorsal Motor Nucleus (DMN) controls the afferent fibers (conducting signals *TO* the Central Nervous System).

The vagus nerve transmits and receives signals to and from numerous major organ systems, and controls the parasympathetic (calming) response. Its importance for our well-being cannot be overstated. Modern research has uncovered its immense role in our health, although it can sometimes be complex to comprehend.

The vagus nerve's health is often referred to as vagal tone. This term is used in medical texts and throughout this article to describe the relative functionality of the vagus nerve. Higher vagal tone indicates better overall health of the vagus nerve, while lower vagal tone suggests poorer functioning.

Researchers have used HRV as an indicator of vagal tone and found that it can accurately forecast the prognosis of patients with similar diagnoses. In other words, patients with higher vagal tone tend to fare better than those with lower vagal tone. Thus, vagal tone is a critical factor in predicting the outcomes of patients with various health conditions, ranging from allergies to cancer.

Vagal tone is an important aspect of overall health and well-being. There are various ways to



assess, measure, and improve vagal tone at home or with the help of technology. Breathing exercises, smartphone apps, HRV monitoring systems, and real-time imagining methods can all be used to evaluate and enhance vagal function. This article provides a brief overview of the vagus nerve and its role in the body, along a link to additional resources for further reading.

As mentioned, afferent and efferent are two types of nerve fibers that carry impulses in opposite directions. Afferent nerves transmit sensory information from the body to the central nervous system, while efferent nerves convey motor commands from the brain to the muscles or glands. In other words, afferent nerves sense and detect stimuli such as touch, pain, temperature, and pressure, whereas efferent nerves respond by initiating movements or secretions.

The vagus nerve contains both afferent and efferent branches, allowing it to act as an observer of, and controller for, the CNS. To differentiate between these two, I use the phrase, "A for Action."

HRV, as the most reliable indicator of vagal tone, measures the time interval between heartbeats, typically in milliseconds. Higher averages indicate better health of the vagus nerve.

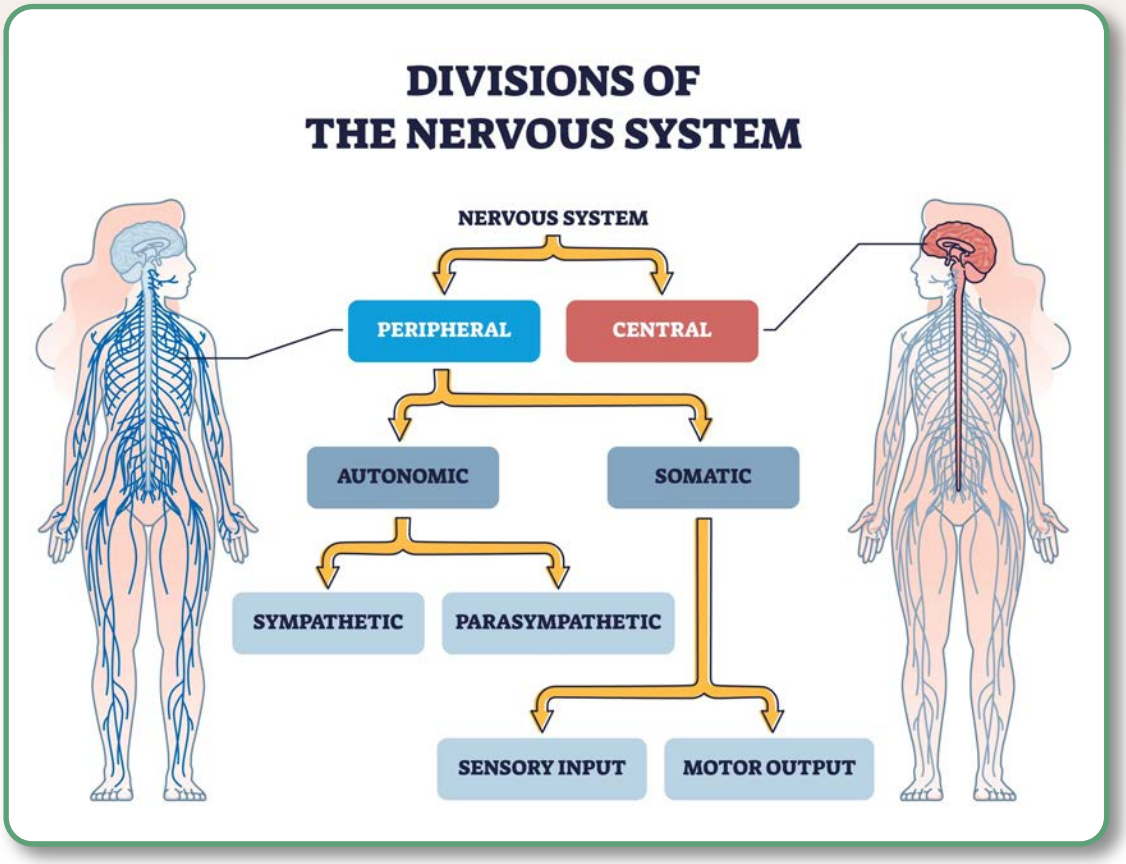
The HPA axis, named after its components of the hypothalamus, pituitary gland, and adrenal glands, is responsible for regulating stress responses in the body. The hypothalamus and pituitary gland are located near the brain stem while the adrenal glands sit above the kidneys. Probiotics have been found to affect HPA function through their impact on vagus nerve activity. This re-lationship between gut health and mental well-being has come to be known as the "gut-brain connection."

Vagal stimulation is believed to be an effective way of increasing vagus nerve activity. This can involve anything from gargling water to using specific electronic frequencies. Other therapies include; exercise, laughing and socializing, singing, chanting, meditation, massage, breathwork, and Bowenwork.

Vagal stimulation has been investigated for its potential benefits in various contexts, including enhancing athletic performance, improving digestion, and managing significant conditions such as metabolic syndrome and epilepsy.

CRYSTAL MACEIRA *is a Certified Bowenwork Practitioner, practicing in Helena. She has been a massage therapist for 23+ years. She is also a Master Herbalist and certified IIPA Iridologist. She prepares her own single and formula-blend herbal tinctures. Find out more by visiting her website at:* PositiveLifeChange.info.

Call Crystal at 406-616-2599
crystalclearhealth@gmail.com



A Cranial Nerve

The vagus nerve is the 10th cranial nerve, denoted in medical texts as CN X. The pair of nerves—afferent (right) and efferent (left)—runs along both sides of the body.

The Autonomic Nervous System is composed of three primary parts: The Sympathetic, Parasympathetic, and Enteric Systems. The vagus nerve has a critical role in all of them.

The vagus nerve plays a crucial role in regulating the body's inflammatory response by acting as the central hub of the hypo-pituitary axis (HPA). It transmits signals between the gut and brain, which helps to modulate immune responses throughout the body.

The vagus nerve is a cranial nerve originating in the brainstem, which passes through the neck and thorax, and extends down through the diaphragm to the abdomen. This long and winding path is how it got the nickname, "the wandering nerve."

Regulatory Oversight

The vagus nerve is a crucial component in regulating various bodily systems. Recent studies suggest that its impact may be more significant than previously thought. The nerve has long been recognized for its influence on the regulation of the heartbeat, the voice, swallowing and hiccups, gut motility and digestion, enzyme and bile production, which are both essential for digestion.

In conclusion, the vagus nerve is one of the most crucial components in the human body's nervous system. It controls various organs, including the heart and gastrointestinal tract. The strength of vagal tone has been linked to better health outcomes, while dysregulation may contribute to numerous diseases. ■

Article inspired by Jack West at Optimus Medica. His full article, ***"Vagus Nerve: The Most Important Part of Your Body,"*** *is available* HERE.

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Crystal Maceira, CBP, LMT, MH

IIPA Certified Iridologist, Master Herbalist & Licensed Massage Therapist, Trained in many modalities including: Bowenwork, Pregnancy Massage and Sports Massage. *Quiet home studio.*

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