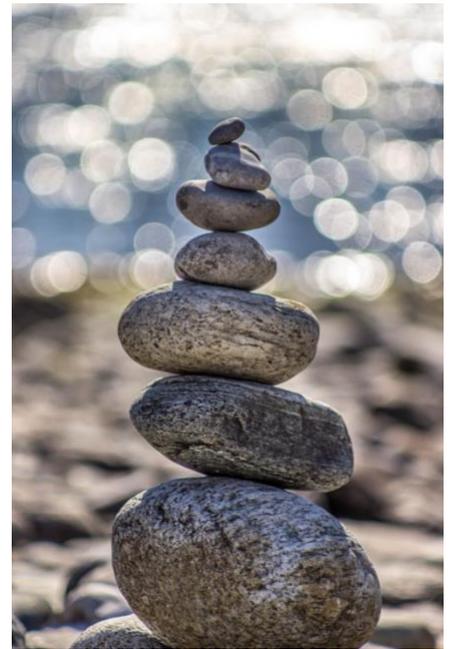


Four Ways to Turn on the Parasympathetic Response for Anxiety

Here are 4 body-calming techniques to help you regulate your emotions in stressful situations:

1. Deep Breathing and Vagal Tone

- Vagal tone is a measure of how strong your parasympathetic response is, how good your autonomic nervous system is at calming down
- Just like other muscle tone, vagal tone indicates how much you use your parasympathetic nervous system, and how strong it is
- How to feel your vagal tone? Find your pulse on your wrist or neck, close eyes, and focus. Breathe in and breathe out slowly, and pay attention to heart rate. Your heart rate slows down when you breath out. This is heart rate variability.
- If you have a stronger vagal tone, your heart rate will slow down even more on the out breath. You can strengthen your vagal tone with deep breathing. Higher vagal tone is associated with better general health. It leads to better blood sugar regulation, better heart health, improved digestion, and reduction in migraines. It improves emotional stability and resilience.
- Lower vagal tone is associated with mood instability, depression, PTSD, chronic fatigue syndrome, diabetes, cognitive impairment, and inflammation.
- This is why deep breathing helps with stress and anxiety. Slow, deep breathing helps to increase your vagal tone and trigger that parasympathetic response through the vagus nerve. You may feel yourself relax when you do it.
- Practicing deep breathing, and especially that long, slow out breath, will help you soothe that stress response, and it can train your body to be better at kicking on that calming parasympathetic response. This is really helpful for people with anxiety disorders and PTSD.



2. Peripheral Vision and Softening the Eyes

- Lose focus on one particular thing
- This happens when lost in thought
- Tunnel vision happens when you're stressed, which is a sympathetic response. When we soften our eyes, we can trigger a parasympathetic response.
- Soften the muscles around your eyes: maybe squeeze them shut and then gently relax them
- Try to expand your awareness to your sides while keeping your eyes looking straight ahead.

3. The Valsalva Maneuver

- Increase the pressure in your chest cavity
- Bear down as if you're pooping
- Plug your nose, and close your mouth, and push out as if you're gonna exhale
- The vagus nerve actually comes into contact with your pelvic floor.
- Triggers the heart to slow down
- Try breathing in for 5 seconds, hold it/bear down for 5 seconds, then release the breath for 5 seconds. Do this once or twice in a row, breathing regularly in between so you don't get light-headed, and this can help trigger that vagus nerve.

4. The Yawn

- Make the R sound, open your mouth really big, and try to lift your soft palate in the back of the roof of your mouth. This can make you yawn. Or try to trigger a fake yawn.
- Dogs do this to calm down, after getting very excited.
- Yawns are contagious because yawning is actually a herd behavior. They keep the pack from going wild. They send a message to calm down.