

## **Activities for Calming the Body and Working With Your Nervous System**

### **Breathwork**

#### *Belly Breathing*

- While lying down or sitting in a comfortable position, place a hand on your heart/chest and one on your stomach.
- Breathe in through your nose, and rather than feeling your ribcage expand outward, focus on feeling your stomach expand when inhaling. Exhale through pursed lips for at least 4 seconds.

#### *Physiological Sigh*

- Inhale through your nose once. Pause. Take another short inhale in, like an extra sip of oxygen, then exhale through your mouth for 6-8 seconds. Repeat 2-3x.

#### *Box Breathing*

- Breathe in through your nose for four seconds, hold for four seconds, exhale through your mouth for four seconds, hold for four seconds, repeat.

#### *Alternate Nostril Breathing*

- Bring your right hand toward your nose, then use your right thumb to close your right nostril. Inhale through your left nostril, at the top of the inhale, close your left nostril with your finger, remove your thumb from your right nostril, and exhale through your right nostril. Continue to close your left nostril while you inhale through your right nostril, at the top of the inhale, close your right nostril, open your left nostril, and exhale through your left nostril. This is one cycle.
- Repeat this cycle for up to five minutes. Be sure to finish the practice with an exhale through the left nostril.

### **Touch Related Practices**

#### *Self Holding Exercise*

- You can have your eyes opened or closed, whatever feels more comfortable for you. You can lie down or be seated, just get into a comfortable position. Place one hand on your forehead, place the other hand on your heart.
- As you sit like this, notice shifts that may happen in your body. You can also focus on the sensations of your hand resting on your forehead, and/or your hand resting on your chest. Remind yourself you are safe. Stay here for at least a few minutes, or for whatever amount of time feels good to you.
- Next, move the hand from your forehead to your belly. Focus on the sensations of your hand resting on your belly, feeling it rise and fall with your breath. Notice any shifts that may happen in your body.

### *Butterfly Hug Exercise*

- Cross your arms and place each hand on the opposite shoulder. Start with your left hand, slowly lifting it and tapping back down on the arm. Alternate to do this once with your right hand. Continue to alternate tapping each arm once at a slow, rhythmic pace.
- Integrate breath and movement here by breathing in as you raise a hand, breathing out as you bring the hand back to the arm each time.

### *Hands Over Eye Sockets*

- Bring palms together at your belly/waist and begin rubbing together like you're washing your hands. Notice any sensations. Continue this motion while slowly bringing hands upwards to chest height. Continue to notice any change in sensations.
- Then place the base of your palms gently over your eyes, cupping your forehead with your hands, apply light gentle pressure for 10-30 seconds.
- Then place the base of palms under the chin with fingers cupping cheeks. Allow your head and neck to relax. Hold for 10 seconds.
- Place one hand over your heart and one hand on your belly, finish with three deep breaths into the belly with long, slow exhales through the mouth.

### *Vagus Nerve Self Massage*

- The vagus nerve goes downward from the brain stem, passing through the left and right sides of the neck. It is close to the skin, so it can be stimulated by massage.
- Place your fingers just above the clavicle at the base of your neck and begin to gently massage upward, to the sides. Continue to massage both sides for 3-5 minutes.
- If you'd like to extend this massage, begin massaging the earlobes, where the vagus nerve also reaches.

### *Cold Exposure*

- Immersing your face in very cold water for 20-30 seconds can have an immediate calm, relaxing effect. Repeat for 3 cycles of 20-30 seconds each. If this seems too intense, apply a washcloth soaked in ice water to your face.
- Alternatively, you can also do 20-30 seconds of cold water in the shower as a daily practice.
- You can also apply cold water to your hands/wrists, focusing on that sensation while rubbing hands together like you're washing them.

## **Movement**

### *1 Minute Somatic Release*

- Unclench your jaw, drop your shoulders, shake your hands out, move your eyes side to side, stick out your tongue and exhale, then take 3 deep belly breaths.

### *Shaking it off*

- Shake out the part of you that feels tense. Jump, kick and throw your hand up. Surrender to the shaking. Let out any sounds that want to come out. You should feel the release of tension.

### *Proprioceptive Input*

- Proprioception is your body's ability to know where it is at any given time. You can create proprioceptive input by- getting or giving hugs, stomping your feet, weighted blankets, rolling up tightly in a blanket like a burrito, star jumps or pushups, massages, or sitting on the ground and pressing your back firmly into the wall.

### *Progressive Muscle Relaxation*

- Find a comfortable position laying down or seated. Take a few deep, grounding belly breaths and begin to focus on your breathing. Starting with your feet, begin to tense your feet muscles as tightly as you can without strain, hold for 5 seconds, then release. Continue to repeat this, moving through muscle groups in your body (calves, thighs/hips, stomach/chest, arms/hands, face, then the entire body together). Focus on noticing the sensation of tension, then the opposite sensations of relaxation.

### *Heel Drops*

Stand on your tip toes and drop onto your heels, making a thud sound. Feel the vibration through your legs and into your torso. Repeat for as long as you would like, minimum 1 minute.

### *Legs Up The Wall*

- Laying down, place your legs up the wall. Place a hand on your heart and a hand on your belly. Notice your breathing, take deep belly breaths, and 'hang' in this position for 5-10 minutes. Focus your attention on your inner sensations and breath.

### *Take a Mindful Walk*

- Take a walk while focusing your attention on one aspect at a time. For example, focus on the sensation of your feet touching the ground with each step. Or, focus on the sound of birds/nature around you. Engage your five senses as much as you can!

### *Short Yoga Flow*

- Start with mindful breathing, lay on your back with legs extended and arms crossed on top of your lower abdomen. With your eyes closed or while staring at a point in the ceiling, begin breathing slowly and deeply.
- Move to child's pose; From a standing position, bend your knees to the ground and then assume a Face down position, resting on your bent knees and sitting back on your calves. Place your forehead on the mat with your arms fully extended forward so your shoulders are next to your ears. Try to settle fully down on your shins, and reach forward and press downward with your hands as far as you can. Feel the stretching through your

back, arms, and shoulders. Be sure to breathe slowly and deliberately, being aware of each and inhale and exhale. Hold this pose for 30 to 60 seconds then slowly move to the next pose.

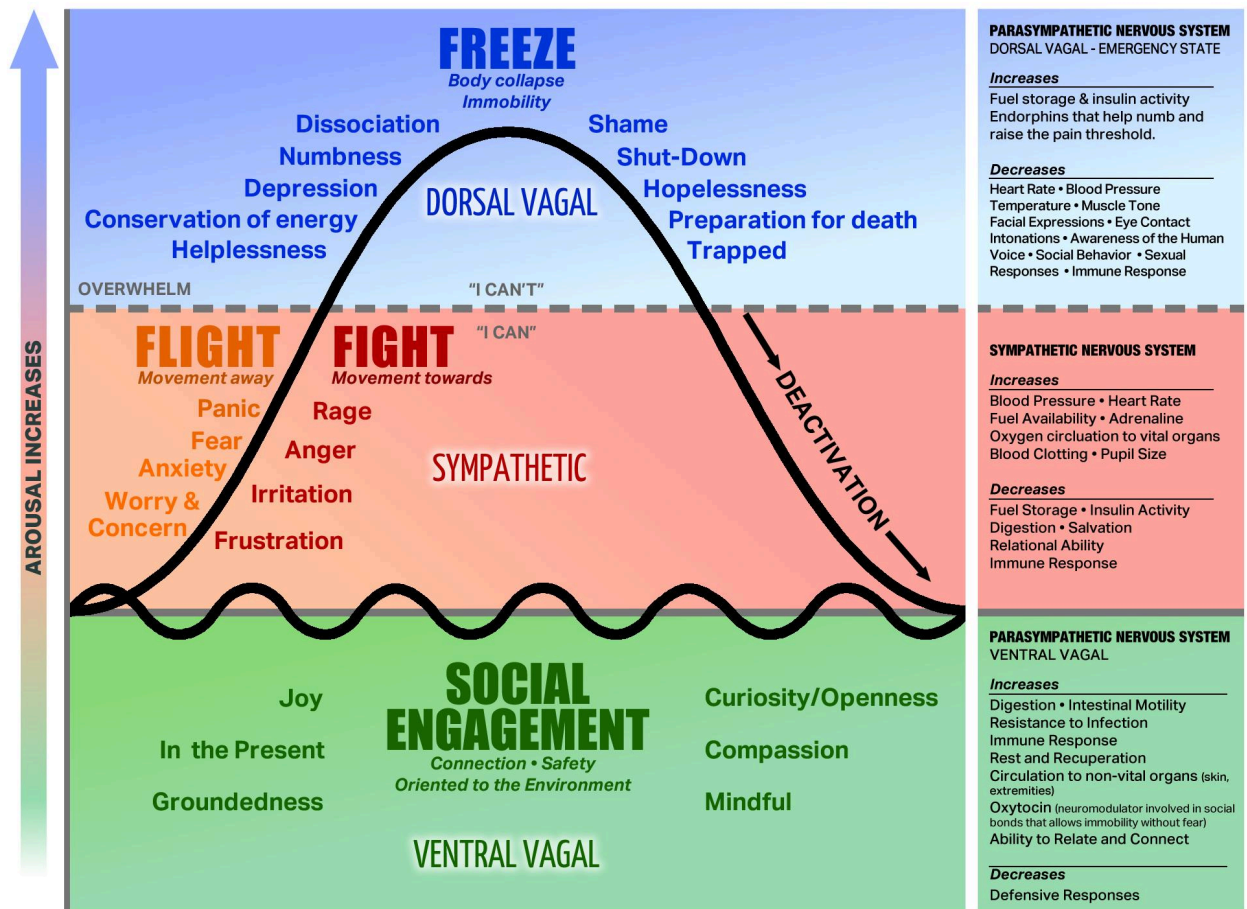
- Move to cats and cows; move to your hands and knees in a table pose with a flat back. Begin to inhale and raise/arch your back toward the ceiling (like an angry cat), hold this position fully extended for a few seconds, then begin to exhale and lower your back to it's lowest position, pushing your gut as far downward as you can (like a swaybacked cow), hold this position fully extended for a few seconds. Continue to alternate between cats while inhaling, and cows while exhaling.
- Move to downward facing dog; begin while on your hands and knees, and slowly and fully extend your arms, while raising your hips and rear towards the ceiling. Allow your heels to rise and initially keep some bend in your knees. After 10-15 seconds of holding, begin to try to straighten your legs out, alternating stretching one leg, then the other. Continue to try to lengthen your spine, pushing your hips toward the ceiling. Hold for 20-30 seconds, then relax.
- Move to cobra; Start by lying face down with your hands next to your shoulders. Begin to inhale slowly and deeply as you slowly push your head and shoulders upward. Pause when you feel a slight strain in your lower back. Complete the inhale; then slowly lower back to the mat, exhaling as you do so. Repeat at least 8 times, or alternatively, hold the upward stretch for a longer period of time, and repeat 3-4 times.

### **Explanation of the Vagus Nerve**

The vagus nerve is the longest nerve in your body. It connects your brain to many important organs throughout the body, including the gut, heart and lungs. The vagus nerve regulates our nervous system, initiating survival responses (fight, flight, or freeze) through the sympathetic nervous system, as well as activating the parasympathetic “rest and digest” nervous system. It influences your breathing, digestive function and heart rate, all of which can have a huge impact on your mental health.

In a fight or flight survival response, you may feel increased heart rate, sweating, muscle tension, aggression, a strong urge to leave, dizziness, and/or nausea due to activation of the sympathetic system giving you a burst of survival energy. In a freeze response, where the body begins to feel stuck in a stressful situation, it begins to attempt to conserve energy and you may feel things like brain fog, fatigue, hopelessness, and/or numbness.

With regular practices to stimulate the vagus nerve, it's tone improves (like a muscle being worked out at the gym). Increasing your vagal tone helps your body begin to move more flexibly in and out of states of stress, rather than experiencing stress and getting stuck in this survival response.



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