

Moda Wellbeing Newsletter

Seasonal recipes, resources and tips to build
Happier, healthier, workplaces



Mindset Matters

Meet the Vagus Nerve: Your Body's Pathway to Calm

The vagus nerve is an important part of the autonomic nervous system, which controls automatic body functions like heart rate, blood pressure, and digestion. It runs from the brainstem down through the heart, lungs, and digestive system. As a key player in the parasympathetic (rest-and-digest) nervous system, the vagus nerve helps the body shift from stress and anxiety (fight-or-flight) to a state of calm and relaxation.

Have you ever noticed how taking a deep breath makes you feel calmer? Or how stress can upset your stomach? That's the vagus nerve at work. It connects your emotions to physical responses, helping to lower heart rate and blood pressure, support digestion, and create a sense of relaxation when activated.

Now that we have a better understanding of the function and importance of this nerve, let's explore how to engage and improve its function. Vagal nerve stimulation (VNS) can help your body reset after a stressful event. It can also help you feel more relaxed if you're agitated, nervous, or anxious.

- **Vibrating Sounds:** Making noises such as humming, gargling, or singing can create vibrations that stimulate the vagus nerve. The focus on breath also increases heart rate variability.
- **Chill out:** Cold exposure triggers a series of physiological responses including the activation of the vagus nerve to slow down your heart rate. Cold exposure can look like a cold shower, dipping your face in ice water, or placing an ice pack on the back of your neck.
- **Massage:** Not only does massage release tension throughout the body, but it's a wonderful method of VNS. Massaging the head and neck stimulates vagal sensory neurons, activating the parasympathetic nervous system. Some studies of reflexology of the feet have also shown to be fruitful in VNS so show your soles some love.

Check out the Health Coach Hub for a bonus VNS technique!

Health Coaching Hub

Stress & Self Care: Just Breathe

It's normal to experience stress. Sometimes stress is expected, like stress ahead of a doctor's appointment, a job interview, or holidays and events; sometimes it's not, like when symptoms flare up, or negative thoughts catch you off guard. When your body is under stress, it responds by raising your heart rate and blood pressure. Over time, this can put a strain on your heart. And while you can't always control stressful situations, you can control how you respond.

Breathing exercises can be a powerful way to manage that stress. Breathing can calm and regulate your autonomic nervous system (ANS), which oversees involuntary bodily functions such as temperature. It can also:

- lower blood pressure
- provide a sense of calm
- reduce stress
- help manage anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and insomnia
- aid in pain management

Below are some quick stress reduction techniques that might help you "just breathe" through a stressful situation. Pick 1 (or more) of the below to try, really take note of how you feel after each exercise.

☞ 5 on 5 deep breathing technique

-- Inhale slowly, deeply and thoughtfully for a count of 5: 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

-- Hold that deep breath for 5 seconds.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5

-- Exhale slowly and thoughtfully for a count of 5: 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

-- Repeat this sequence 5 times



👉 Alternate nostril breathing

--To begin, sit comfortably on floor or chair keeping back straight but relaxed

--Using right thumb, press gently on your right nostril to close it and take a slow smooth deep breath through your left nostril

--Then close your left nostril with your right finger (the one next to the little finger) while releasing your thumb from your right nostril, and breath out slowly through your right nostril

-- Keeping your left nostril closed, breathe in through your right nostril.

Then close this nostril again. Open your left nostril and breathe out through it.

-- Go back to step 1 and repeat the process for as long as you want to.

Research shows that doing regular alternate nostril breathing for 30 minutes a day can lower your stress levels, help to reduce your heart rate, lower blood pressure, promote feelings of wellbeing

Health Coaching Hub Continued



Box Breathing Technique

- Inhale slowly for a count of 4
- Hold breath for a count of 4
- Exhale slowly for a count of 4
- Hold breath again for a count of 4

Essentially, creating a “box” pattern with your breath, repeating the cycle as often as you like until you feel calmer. The magic is in the focus on controlled breathing...

Using deep breathing exercises allows carbon dioxide (CO₂) to temporarily build up in your blood, stimulating your parasympathetic nervous system, causing your body to relax, and decreasing your heart rate and blood pressure. And the beauty of breathing exercises is how easy they are. You can do them anytime and anywhere, and they are completely free. All you need to do is remember is “just breathe”.

Contact us for more information!

Eligible Moda Health members have access to condition management coaching at no cost. Work one-on-one with a professional health coach to set health and wellness goals for your unique needs.

Call 800-913-4957 Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Pacific time, or email healthcoachteam@modahealth.com.

Beyond the Plate: Spring Simmer Pot

A simmer pot is a simple, natural way to fill your home with cozy, refreshing scents. By gently simmering water with aromatic ingredients like citrus, herbs, and spices, you can create an inviting atmosphere without candles or artificial sprays. The best part? You can make it your own by swapping in your favorite ingredients- try different berries, herbs, or spices to find your perfect blend. It's a perfect way to embrace the season, whether you're winding down after a long day or hosting guests. Just remember, this is for fragrance, not flavor- so enjoy the aroma, but skip the taste test!

Ingredients:

50 grams fresh blueberries (about 1/3 cup)

1 whole lemon, sliced

Mint leaves, generous handful, or about 1 cup leaves

1 6-inch Cinnamon Stick

1 tablespoon dried lavender flowers

1 4-inch piece fresh ginger, sliced into ¼-inch pieces

Instructions:

- Fill a large saucepan or stock pot about ¾ full with water, allowing a few inches of space at the top to add your ingredients.
- Add all ingredients to the pot
- Bring to a gentle simmer on the stovetop. Simmer over low heat for as long as desired, topping off with additional water as needed



Recipe Source & Picture:
[Spring Simmer Pot Recipe](#)

Better Bites: Crock-Pot Taco Soup

Ontario High School recently turned up the heat with their "Souper Bowl Cook-Off", bringing the school community together for some friendly competition and delicious flavors. The standout dish? A hearty, flavorful **Crock-Pot Taco Soup**, crafted by **Guerline Hyppolite**, also known as Miss G, who wowed the staff with her perfect blend of spices and comforting ingredients. Miss G shared, "Cooking has always been something I enjoy, and I'm honored by this recognition. I'm grateful to my family, colleagues, and everyone who voted for my soup!" She also expressed how warmly the school community has welcomed her, saying it's been a joy to work alongside such supportive staff and students.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 can (15 oz) black beans
- 1 can of pinto beans
- 1 can of white beans
- 1 can of kidney beans
- 1 can (15 oz) corn, drained
- 1 can (14.5 oz) diced tomatoes with seasoning flavor or any other kind.
- 1 package Taco seasoning
- 1 cup of beef broth or water
- Pepper and salt (pinch)

Instructions:

1. Brown the ground beef in a skillet and drain the fat.
2. Add beef, black beans, pinto beans, kidney beans, white beans and corn, can of diced tomatoes, taco seasoning, beef broth or any other broth you have or water to the crock-pot.
3. Cook on low for 6 hours. Recipe serves 6 people

Optional Toppings:

Serve with sour cream, shredded cheese, corn chips, cilantro, avocado, limes, jalapenos or diced onions



Miss G with her award-winning Crock Pot Taco Soup

Getting Childhood Immunizations Back on Track

Over the past few years, many children have missed important check-ups, leading to delays in routine vaccinations. Staying up to date on these vaccines is key to ensuring your child is protected and ready for school, childcare, and beyond. Keeping immunizations up to date not only helps prevent the return of serious diseases but also protects against long-term health issues that can arise.

Why Regular Check-ups Matter

The first 30 months (two and a half year) of life, it's important for children to have regular wellness check-ups to track growth, discuss developmental milestones, and monitor nutrition and sleep habits. After your child turns two, annual visits are recommended to ensure they stay healthy and up to date on vaccinations.

Tips for Staying on Track with Immunizations

- **Plan Ahead:** At each visit, ask about upcoming vaccines and make sure you're clear on when the next doses are due.
- **Take Advantage of Each Visit:** If your child is eligible for any vaccines, try to have them administered during the visit to avoid extra trips to the office.
- **Schedule Follow-ups:** Set the date for your child's next immunization visit before leaving the office so it's one less thing to think about later.
- **Don't Forget to Reschedule Missed Appointments:** If your child misses a vaccine, be sure to reschedule within a few days. Call your healthcare provider's office to get back on track.
- **Understand Alternative Schedules:** If you follow a different vaccination schedule, make sure you have a clear plan to ensure your child's vaccines are up-to-date by age two.
- **Consider Early HPV Vaccination:** Starting the HPV vaccine series at age 9 can improve the likelihood your child will stay up to date as they grow older.

Reducing Vaccine Stress for Kids

If your child feels anxious about getting shots, there are simple strategies to make the process easier. Tools like the Buzzy Bee, J-Tip, or Shot Blocker can help minimize discomfort and anxiety. For more ideas on how to comfort your child during vaccinations, check out this helpful poster from [Hennepin Healthcare](#).



Let's Learn! Resource Spotlight

The Path to Sustainability Challenge


Did you know that the typical U.S. adult has a carbon footprint of 16 tons (nearly four adult elephants in weight) a year? Even with such an enormous statistic, there are a lot of "steps" you can take to reduce your carbon footprint by several tons a year and help leave the Earth a little better than before. Carbon footprints are the imprints that shape our planet's future.

Directions:
The goal of this challenge is to walk through Leafy Lane Park by completing Earth-friendly activities to help keep our environment clean and reduce your waste. Use the ideas below or create your own! When you complete an activity, fill in a footprint, and continue your stroll through Leafy Lane Park.

Activity ideas to help reduce your carbon footprint:

- Try a plant-based recipe
- Reuse or repurpose bags and jars for shopping or storage
- Collect rainwater for outdoor use
- Wash laundry in cold water
- Shop at a farmer's market or second-hand store
- Change your commute (walk, bike, carpool, public transit)
- Turn off computer, screens and other electronics when not in use
- Opt for reusable straws, cups or cloth napkins
- Print double-sided
- Collect 10 pieces of trash
- Participate in a tree-planting initiative or plant one in your yard
- Cook more meals at home vs. takeout
- Make your own earth-friendly cleaners or detergent
- Shorten your shower by five minutes or reduce the water temperature

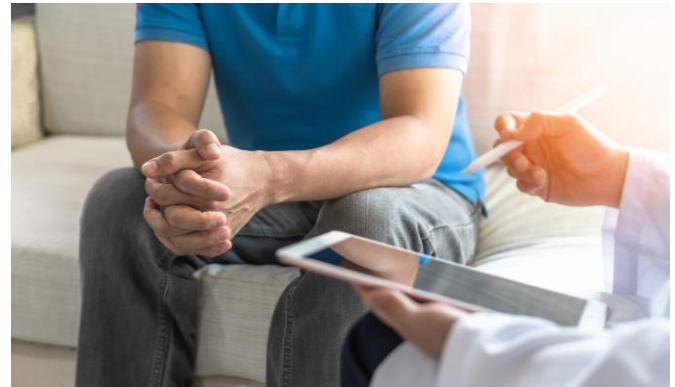
Do you know what your carbon footprint is? Try EPA's Household Carbon Footprint Calculator to estimate your annual greenhouse gas emissions.



Connect with a health coach – just for you!
Eligible members can work confidentially with a health coach, available at no cost, to set sustainable health goals and move toward them in ways that work best for you. You will better understand your health, how to advocate for yourself, and self-manage ongoing health issues. Since health coaching takes place by phone or video, it's easy to connect from just about anywhere. For more information, contact healthcoachteam@modahealth.com or call 800-913-4957.

modahealth.com

moda HEALTH



March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

According to the CDC, the best way to lower your risk of colorectal cancer is to get screened regularly starting at age 45. Regular screenings help detect cancer early when it's easier to treat. Most insurance plans cover colorectal cancer screenings at no cost.

Talk to your doctor if you think you're at higher risk for colorectal cancer. Discuss when to start, how often to get screened, and which screening is right for you.

Common screening options include:

- **Colonoscopy:** Recommended every 10 years, this test checks for polyps or cancer in the entire colon and rectum. The doctor can remove most polyps or cancers during the procedure. It's also used if other tests find something unusual.
- **Stool Tests (FOBT/FIT):** These at-home kits let you collect a stool sample and send it to a lab for testing. They are usually recommended every year or every three years, depending on the test.
- **Flexible Sigmoidoscopy:** Recommended every 5 years, this test checks the rectum and lower third of the colon for polyps or cancer.
- **CT Colonography (Virtual Colonoscopy):** Recommended every 5 years, this test uses X-rays and computers to take images of the colon for the doctor to examine.

More information and resources about colorectal cancer screenings:

[Reducing Risk for Colorectal Cancer | Colorectal Cancer | CDC](#)

[Colorectal Cancer Guideline | How Often to Have Screening Tests | American Cancer Society](#)

Moda Health Monthly Mini Challenges

Mini Challenges are a great way to encourage a healthier way of living! They're designed to create lasting change through small, simple steps, while also providing a fun activity that fosters friendly competition, teambuilding, and a supportive workplace culture.

Check out Moda Health's mini challenges for March and April!

- **Play the Stress Away Challenge:** In this three-week challenge, fill in your game board using the playful activities listed, or create your own. Each activity is worth 1-2 points based on complexity. Get as far along your gameboard as you can with the goal of reaching the end by week 3. [Click here](#) to access the challenge.
- **Path to Sustainability Challenge:** In this challenge, take a "walk through Leafy Lane Park" by completing various tasks that promote environmental sustainability. [Click here](#) to access the challenge.