

IMPORTANT NOTE: The exercises in this handout were taken from this book.

I **HIGHLY** encourage you to PLEASE purchase the book. It is well written and explains why and how these exercises can help you undo deep-seated trauma.

We must take the habit of paying creators for their hard work

Thank you

ACCESSING the HEALING POWER of the VAGUS NERVE

**SELF-HELP EXERCISES
FOR ANXIETY,
DEPRESSION,
TRAUMA,
AND AUTISM**



Stanley Rosenberg

Forewords by Stephen Porges, PhD
and Benjamin Shield, PhD

The Basic Exercise

The goal of this exercise is to enhance social engagement. It repositions the atlas (C1, the first cervical/neck vertebra) and the axis (C2) and increases mobility in the neck and the entire spine. (See “Axis” and “Atlas” in the Appendix.) It increases blood flow to the brainstem, where the five cranial nerves necessary for social engagement originate. This can have a positive effect on the ventral branch of the vagus nerve (CN X), as well as on cranial nerves V, VII, IX, and XI.

The Basic Exercise is effective, easy to learn, and easy to do, and takes less than two minutes to complete. I usually teach this exercise to my clients in their very first session.

BEFORE AND AFTER DOING THE BASIC EXERCISE

Evaluate the relative freedom of movement of your head and neck. Rotate your head to the right as far as it goes comfortably. Then come back to the center, pause, and rotate your head to the left. How far do you rotate to each side? Is there any pain or stiffness?

After doing the exercise, make these same movements again. Is there any improvement in the range of your movement? If there was pain when you rotated your head, did the exercise reduce the level of the pain?

Most people I have treated are surprised to experience an improvement in the range of movement as they rotate their head to the right and left. Better movement of the neck often accompanies an improvement in the circulation of blood to the brainstem, which in turn improves the function of the ventral branch of the vagus nerve.

You or your client will probably want to repeat the exercise as needed.

BASIC EXERCISE INSTRUCTIONS

The first few times that you do the exercise, you should lie on your back. After you are familiar with the exercise, you can do it sitting on a chair, standing, or lying on your back.

1. Lying comfortably on your back, weave the fingers of one hand together with the fingers of the other hand (Figure 4, 5, and 6).



Figure 4. Fingers interwoven



Figure 5. Hands behind the head



Figure 6. Lying on the back

2. Put your hands behind the back of your head, with the weight of your head resting comfortably on your interwoven fingers. You should feel the hardness of your cranium with your fingers, and you should feel the bones of your fingers on the back of your head. If you have a stiff shoulder and cannot bring both of your hands up behind the back of your head, it is sufficient to use one hand, with the fingers and palm contacting both sides of the back of your head.
3. Keeping your head in place, look to the right, moving only your eyes, as far as you comfortably can. Do not turn your head; just move your eyes. Keep looking to the right (Figure 7).
4. 4. After a short period of time—up to thirty or even sixty seconds—you will swallow, yawn, or sigh. This is a sign of relaxation in your autonomic nervous system. (A normal inbreath is followed by an outbreath, but a sigh is different—after you breathe in, a second inbreath follows on top of the first inbreath, before the outbreath.)



Figure 7. Looking to the right

5. Bring your eyes back to looking straight ahead.
6. Leave your hands in place, and keep your head still. This time, move your eyes to the left (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Looking to the left

7. Hold your eyes there until you notice a sigh, a yawn, or a swallow.

Now that you have you have completed the Basic Exercise, take your hands away, and sit up or stand up.

Evaluate what you have experienced. Has there been any improvement in the mobility of your neck? Has your breathing changed? Do you notice anything else?

NOTE: If you become dizzy when you sit up or stand up, it is probably because you relaxed when you were lying down, and your blood pressure dropped. This is a normal reaction. It usually takes a minute or two before your blood pressure adjusts and pumps more blood to your brain.

CERVICAL VERTEBRAE AND VENTRAL VAGAL DYSFUNCTION

When I test clients and find that they have ventral vagal dysfunction, I also observe that they have an upper cervical misalignment—i.e., a rotation of the

LEVEL 1: THE HALF-SALAMANDER EXERCISE

To do the first part of the Salamander Exercise to the right, sit or stand in a comfortable position.

1. Without turning your head, let your eyes look to the right.
2. Continuing to face straight forward, tilt your head to the right so that your right ear moves closer to your right shoulder, without lifting the shoulder to meet it (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Half-Salamander with eyes to the right

3. Hold your head in this position for thirty to sixty seconds.
4. Then let your head come back up to neutral, and shift your eyes to look forward again.
5. Now do the same on the other side: let your eyes look to the left, and then side-bend your head to the left. After thirty to sixty seconds, return your head to an upright position, and your eyes to a forward direction.

THE HALF-SALAMANDER—A VARIATION

In this variation on the Half-Salamander Exercise, follow the same instructions above, but let your eyes look to the *right* while tipping your head to the *left* (Figure 11). This movement of your eyes in the opposite direction before you move your head increases your range of motion; you should be able to side-bend your head even further to the left. Hold this for thirty to sixty seconds, and then reverse to do the same thing on the other side.



Figure 11. Half-Salamander with eyes to the left

LEVEL 2: THE FULL SALAMANDER EXERCISE

The Full Salamander Exercise involves side-bending the entire spine rather than just the neck. Also, we use a different body position.

1. Get down on all fours, supporting your weight on your knees and the palms of your hands. You can rest your hands on the floor, but it is better if you place the palms of your hands on a desktop, a table, the seat of a chair, or the pillows of a sofa. Your head should be on the same plane as your spine (Figure 12).



Figure 12. Salamander on all fours

2. In this exercise, your ears should be neither lifted above nor dropped below the level of your spine. In order to find the right head position, lift your head slightly above what you think is right. You should be able to sense that your head is slightly raised. Then lower your head slightly below what you think is right. You should be able to sense that your head is lower than it should be. Go back and forth between the two positions. Take your head up a little and then take it down a little. Try to find a position in the middle where your head does not feel too far up or down. Although you may never find this position exactly, you can begin to zero in on it.
3. Once you have found a good position for your head relative to your spine, look to the right with your eyes, hold them in that position, and side-bend your head to the right by moving your right ear toward your right shoulder.
4. Complete the movement by letting the bend in your side continue beyond your neck, all the way down to the base of your spine.
5. Hold this position for thirty to sixty seconds.
6. Bring your spine and head back to center.



Figure 13. Salamander with head to the left

7. Repeat all steps above, but on the left side (Figure 13).

SCM Exercise for a Stiff Neck

This exercise will extend your range of movement as you rotate your head, alleviate symptoms of a stiff neck, and help to prevent migraine headaches. It is similar to the very first movements that we made as infants lying on our stomachs, propped up on our elbows, with our heads free to move so that we could look around.

1. Lie on your stomach (Figure 14). Lift your head, and bring your arms under your chest. Rest the weight of your upper body on your elbows (Figure 15).



Figure 14. Lying on the stomach



Figure 15. Lifting the head

2. Rotate your head to the right as far as it comfortably goes. Hold that position for sixty seconds.
3. Bring your head back to center.



Figure 16. Turning the head to the left

4. Now rotate your head to the left as far as it comfortably goes, and hold that position for sixty seconds (Figure 16).

If you have improved the rotation of the head with this exercise but the movement is still not as good as you want it to be on one side, then the restriction is probably coming from another muscle, the *levator scapulae*, which is innervated by spinal nerves C3–C5. This kind of stiff neck will not be eliminated solely by improving the function of CN XI and the trapezius and sternocleidomastoid muscles. (See “The *Levator Scapulae* Muscle” on page 104).

Part of the stiffness may also come from a hiatal hernia and shortening of the esophagus, since the vagus nerve wraps around the esophagus. (See “Relieving COPD and Hiatal Hernia” on page 91.)

Twist and Turn Exercise for the Trapezius