



Creating an Altruistic Nervous System

by Chris Lucks

***Altruism** or selflessness is the principle or practice of concern for the welfare of others. It is a traditional virtue in many cultures and a core aspect of various religious traditions and secular worldviews.*

The way in which we experience and process life is largely a result of which part of our nervous system is more dominant. An exciting new area of study is the beginning of a fascinating argument that a branch of our nervous system has evolved to support altruistic behaviours.

Our body's response to its environment is regulated by our Autonomic Nervous System, which has two main components – the Sympathetic system and the Parasympathetic system.

The sympathetic system turns up our nervous system to help us handle what we perceive to be emergencies (whether real or imagined). This 'fight or flight' response speeds up our breathing and heart rate, tightens our muscles, slows or stops our digestion, and makes us hyper alert. Activation of the sympathetic system can be prolonged and sustained in our body through a protective state of the spine called *defence posture*. This protective state involves spinal distortions, muscular tension, and repetitive nerve firing which continues long after the initial stress or threat is gone.

The parasympathetic system turns down our nerve system activity and helps us feel calm and relaxed. The main nerve that controls the parasympathetic system is the *vagus nerve*. The vagus nerve activates different organs throughout our body such

as the heart, lungs, stomach, and intestines. It promotes rest, sleep, and ease by slowing down our heart rate, stimulating digestion, slowing and deepening our breathing, relaxing our muscles, and so forth.

Neuroscientist Stephen Porges of the University of Illinois, Chicago, has proposed that the vagus nerve is the nerve of compassion for several scientific reasons. “The vagus nerve stimulates certain muscles in the vocal chamber, enabling communication. It reduces heart rate. It’s closely involved in trust and maternal bonding, and has recently been found to be associated with feelings of caretaking and our connection to a common humanity. People with high vagus nerve activation are more prone to feeling emotions that promote altruism, love and happiness.”

Any practice or activity that soothes or relaxes you can help activate and increase your parasympathetic system. Meditation, yoga, a relaxing walk, or a massage can all be effective.

WELL & WILD care activates and increases your parasympathetic system while simultaneously releasing the protective spinal patterns that otherwise keep you in a sympathetic dominant state. Regular WELL & WILD care increases your vagus nerve activity to support a more parasympathetic dominant state and helps you create a more altruistic nervous system with a greater capacity for love, service, and happiness.

“Altruism is the best source of happiness. There is no doubt about that.”
– Dalai Lama