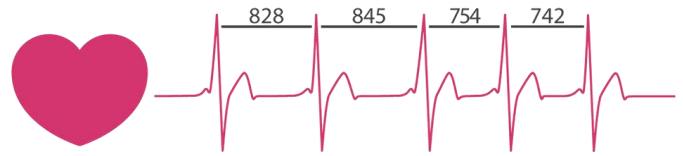


Improving Your Heart Rate Variability



Heart rate variability (HRV) is a measurement of the variation in time between heartbeats. This is controlled by a part of our nervous system known as the autonomic nervous system (ANS). The ANS is responsible for controlling and regulating all organ (heart, stomach, intestine, etc) and system (digestive, immune, endocrine, respiratory, etc) function in the body. It is a measure of how responsive and adaptable our body is – does our heartbeat slow down at rest, speed up with exertion or stress and how quickly can it change.

The vagus nerve (the 10th cranial nerve) is a fundamental component of the parasympathetic (rest and digest) branch of the ANS. Vagal tone has a significant impact on HRV. Healthy vagal tone and higher HRV is associated with better physical and mental well-being. Conversely, if you have a low vagal tone, this is associated with inflammation, heart disease, stroke, poor psychological well-being, and much more.

What Impacts Heart Rate Variability?

It is commonly agreed upon that as we age, our HRV scores decrease, but there are other factors that can increase or decrease HRV in both the short & long term.

As you can probably imagine, doing the opposite of that list should result in an increase in your HRV. The good news is that we can do things which improve our heart rate variability and vagal tone.

Things that decrease HRV (short-term)

- Stress
- Poor sleep
- Poor diet
- Alcohol consumption
- Illness
- Acute overtraining
- Some medications

Things that decrease HRV (long-term)

- Chronic disease or inflammation
- Chronic stressors or burnout
- Chronic lack of sleep
- Lack of fitness
- Chronic Overtraining
- Unhealthy home or work environment

Ways to improve HRV:

1. Chiropractic care – directly influences the nerve system and has been shown to improve vagal tone.
2. Exercise and train appropriately.
3. Good nutrition at the right time – Regular meals and not eating too close to bedtime.
4. Hydration – getting enough water
5. Avoid alcohol – Alcohol can suppress HRV for 4 to 5 days after consumption.
6. Consistent and good sleep. Regular bed and wake times help your body's rhythms and help you get more deep sleep.
7. Natural light exposure
8. Cold thermogenesis – exposing your body to cold temperatures for brief periods of time.
9. Intentional breathing – slow controlled breathing
10. Mindfulness/Meditation/Prayer
11. Gratitude journaling
12. Chanting, singing, humming and gargling – stimulate the vagus nerve.
13. Take probiotics – gut health is controlled by and also impacts the vagus nerve.
14. Massage – regular massage (even some self massage) has been shown to improve vagal tone.
15. Socializing and laughing!