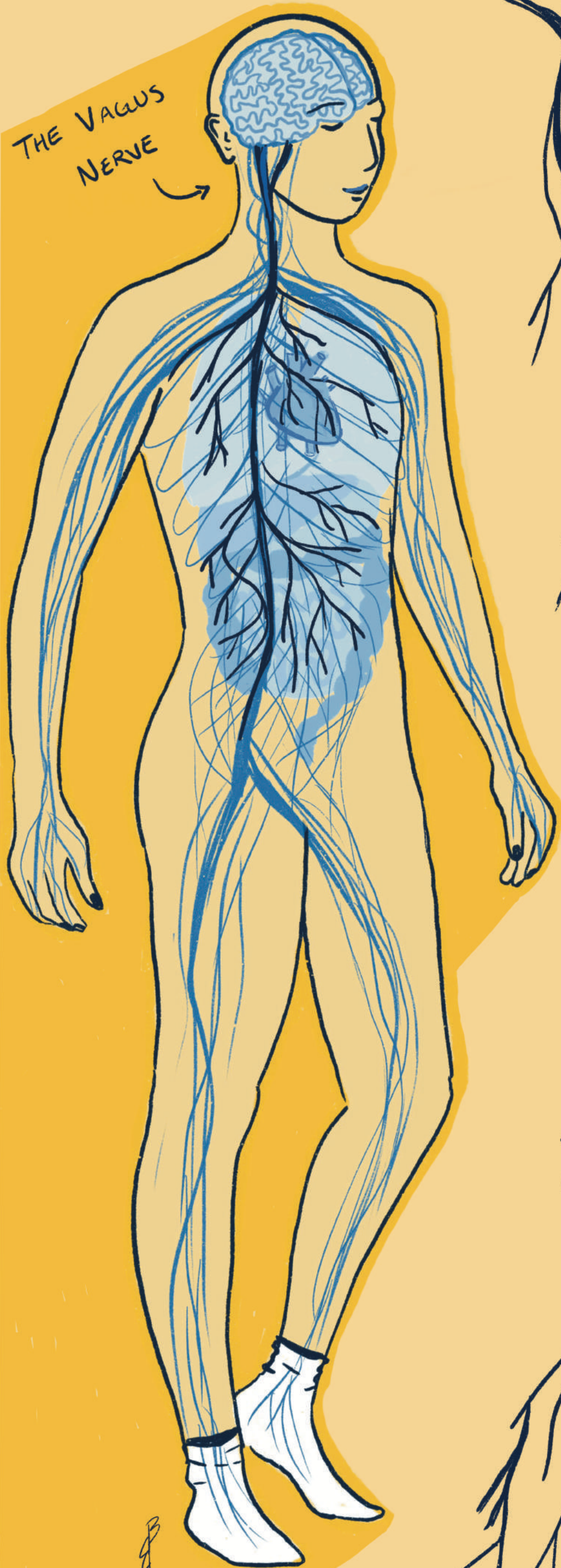


# THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON KINDNESS: THE VAGUS NERVE



## The Nerve

This nerve is the largest and most complex of the 12 cranial nerves. It gets its name “vagus” from the Latin term for “wandering”. This is because the vagus nerve wanders from the brain into organs of the neck, chest and abdomen <sup>(1)</sup>

## The Role of the Vagus Nerve

One of the major components of this system is the influence it has on the parasympathetic nervous system. Activation of this nervous system helps reduce stress and anxiety by slowing down heart rate and decreasing blood pressure, as well as aid in digestion. It also reduces egocentric bias. These physiological systems enable expressions of empathy, compassion, prosociality and altruism.

## The Upward-Spiral Dynamic

Activation of the vagus nerve facilitates an upward-spiral dynamic. This feedback system reinforces positive actions and behaviors which in turn results in positive health outcomes.

## Activating the Nerve

The vagus nerve can be stimulated by engaging in acts of kindness. These “genuine wholehearted micro-moments of social connectedness” were seen to improve vagal tone for the people involved resulting in exponential increase in kindness and positivity. <sup>(2)</sup>



# BUILDING UP THE NERVE:

## ACTIVATING THE VAGUS NERVE!



### The Contagious Loop:

Increasing kindness increases vagal tone. By increasing vagal tone it helps regulate physiological systems that enable expression of empathy, compassion, prosociality and altruism. (3)

### How to increase your Vagal tone!

★ Being kind to yourself increases vagal tone via the contagious loop

★ Being kind to others & prosocial behavior:  
Volunteering and Altruistic acts

-even a small act can make a significant difference in your community

-You can do volunteer work, donate food to your local food banks, donate blood, help with local fundraisers and more!

### The COVID-19 Special!

Social interactions during this time should be limited but there are still kind things you can do without face-to-face contact

Studies have shown that doing a “love and kindness meditation” can also trigger vagal activity, positive affect and well-being in the same way social interaction does.

## Loving-Kindness Meditation

This meditation is meant to increase positive feelings and well being. All you need is yourself, 10 minutes and a quiet place. The point of this meditation is to send out “warm-and-fuzzy” feelings to yourself, friends, family and even someone who has hurt you. It includes love, kindness, compassion and forgiveness. This is a reminder of our human commonality and the universal aspects of struggle.

### The Four Stages

- 1) Think about your friends, family, neighbors and loved ones, Think about how much they mean to you and send them your love.
- 2) Think about strangers anywhere in the world who are suffering and send them your compassion.
- 3) Think about someone who has hurt, maligned or let you down. This may be difficult to do but try and send them your forgiveness or wishes of well-being.
- 4) Think about yourself. Forgive yourself for any negativity or harm you've caused yourself or others. You are only human and deserve love and forgiveness too.