

The vagus nerve, also referred to as the fifth cranial nerve, begins in the brain and extends downward into the abdomen. This nerve supplies areas of the body such as the brain, the heart and lungs, and various organs of the digestive system. Damage to this nerve can cause a host of medical issues and symptoms, including trouble talking or swallowing, hearing loss, or heart or digestive problems. Bladder issues leading to incontinence are often reported in patients with vagus nerve damage as well.

One of the more common symptoms of vagus nerve damage is vocal changes, or changes in a person's voice. The voice may start to sound a bit hoarse if the larynx, or voice box, has suffered damage. Vagus nerve damage can also cause the patient to have trouble moving the tongue as intended when trying to speak, leading to speech difficulty.

A condition known as dysphagia is another common symptom of vagus nerve damage. Dysphagia is a medical condition in which the normal act of swallowing becomes difficult and sometimes even a bit painful. Since the vagus nerve is responsible for controlling many of the muscles in the mouth and tongue, damage to this area prevents some of the movements needed for swallowing.

A person's gag reflex is strongly controlled by the vagus nerve. Therefore, when this nerve has suffered damage or injury, the gag reflex can be reduced or even lost. This can lead to the risk of choking on food or drink or even on saliva. If the vagus nerve damage affects the part of the ear it supplies, hearing loss may occur.

One of the more serious results of vagus nerve damage can be cardiovascular damage affecting the function of the heart and circulatory system. Irregular heartbeat, a condition known as arrhythmia, is the most common of these symptoms. Arrhythmia can cause chest pain, dizziness, and shortness of breath.

Digestive problems can sometimes occur as a result of vagus nerve damage. Persistent constipation is often a symptom of nerve damage in this area. This is most commonly due to abnormalities in the way the stomach and intestines contract. Increased production of stomach acid is also a common symptom of this type of nerve damage.

Incontinence, or an inability to properly control the release of urine, is yet another possible symptom of vagus nerve damage. This is the nerve that supplies the urinary bladder, and damage can prevent the patient from feeling the urge to urinate, leading to loss of bladder control. The results can range from mild urine leakage to a complete inability to control urination.