

Relaxation – Breathing Exercises

The single most effective relaxation technique is *conscious regulation of breath*.

- Breathing is the bridge between your mind and your body, the connection between consciousness & unconscious. It is considered to be a key to health and wellness.
- It is a function you can learn to regulate and develop to improve your physical and psychological health.
- In many languages the words for breath and spirit are exactly the same. The Greek word is Pneuma, Latin word is Spiritus, and the Sanskrit word is Prana. Native Americans believe that life enters the body with the first breath, not at the moment of birth or conception.
- The use of breath is central to the ancient practice of meditation.
- It is portable and can be used anywhere.
- It is the only function you can perform consciously as well as unconsciously. You can breathe voluntarily or involuntarily because it is controlled by 2 sets of nerves. One set belongs to the Voluntary nervous system; the other belongs to the involuntary (autonomic) nervous system. Breath is the bridge between the two systems.
- Most people don't know how to breathe well.
- Knowing how to perform simple breathing techniques can lower your blood pressure, calm a racing heart or help your digestion without taking drugs.
- Breathing has very direct connections to emotional states and moods. Someone who is angry, afraid or upset will breathe rapidly, shallowly, noisily and irregularly.
- **You cannot be upset if your breathing is slow, deep, quiet and regular.**
- **You can't always centre yourself emotionally using willpower..... but you can use your Voluntary nerves to make your breathing slow, deep, quiet & regular... and the rest will follow.**
- **Your breathing can give clues to just how much tension you hold in your body and to just how stressed you might be.**
- Take a moment to notice What is your breathing like?

Poor breathing habits may not only fail to help you feel calm, they may actually make you feel tenser. This is because of that physiological connection between breathing and emotions.

Rapid breathing

Usually means your breathing is shallow and only the chest is moving as you breathe in and out. You are probably using very little of your lungs, which means you have to breathe more to get enough Oxygen and you never get to expel all the stale air in your lungs.

This kind of breathing sets off a stressful physiological chain reaction, which reduces the amount Oxygen in your bloodstream and causes your blood vessels to constrict.

Muscles hurt without enough Oxygen and when the Carbon Dioxide and waste products aren't removed. The brain gets less Oxygen making you feel more tense and nervous.

Deep breathing

Usually means you are using much more of your lungs. As you fill your lungs with air, they push down onto the diaphragm forcing your belly out a little. You may notice your belly rise and fall as you breathe in and out. This is a good sign.

A very healthy balance between the oxygen & carbon dioxide occurs in deep breathing. Your muscles like this. Your organs like this. So does your brain, which in turn, encourages the release of endorphins (natural feel good chemicals & painkillers).

Let's check what your breathing is like.

Count your breath over a one-minute period and record them here.

Now we will carry out a simple breathing exercise.

Simple Breathing Exercise No.1

Begin by closing your eyes (or staring at a point in front of you, letting your eyes gently focus) & setting the intention that you are going to spend a few minutes experiencing what it is like to breathe slowly. Remind yourself that you don't have to be anywhere else, solve any problems, just be here, right now ; experiencing breathing long slow breaths.

Just noticing with each breath, how the tip of your nose feels cool as you breathe in and warm as you breathe out.

Noticing how your chest rises and falls with each breath or perhaps how your belly falls and rises with each breath.

Noticing how you can feel the breath as it travels in through your nose and down your throat into your lungs. Feel the air move deep into your chest; perhaps you feel the air gently pushing your diaphragm down into your belly. Breathe the air all the way down to the back of your belly button.

Notice how your belly rises gently. Notice how your belly falls as you breathe the air all the way back out of your body. The warmed air moves up through your throat and out through your nostrils. Warm at the tip of your nose, warm on the out breath.

You might have already noticed how your mind wanders.... or not. This is very normal. In fact you can expect your mind to wander, sometimes over & over. As soon as you become aware that your mind has wandered, just gently bring your awareness back to the very physical sensations of breathing. You can gently bring your awareness back to the breath over & over.

With each breath, noticing the very physical sensation of the air moving in & out of your body as you breathe. Air travelling deep into your body and travelling back out again. Cool air at the tip of your nose on the breath in And warm on the breath out.

Notice with comfort the never-ending rhythm of your breath.

Begin to experiment with your breath, moving your breath. See how slow, deep, quiet and regular you can make begin to make your breathing and still have it feel perfectly comfortable. Make sure you're getting enough air with no sense of not getting enough air.

Can you begin to make the breath out just as long as the breath in... or even longer than the breath in?

See how slow, quiet, deep and regular you can make your breathing, whilst still feeling comfortable. Make sure you're getting enough air with no sense of not getting enough air. Making the breath out just as long as; or even longer than the breath in. This will help you breathe deeply.

Now, you might like to see what happens if at the end of a normal breath you try squeezing more air out; pushing all the air out of your lungs. You might even feel the muscles between your ribs working, feeling the effort as they compress the rib cage, helping you to push the air out gently. Notice how if you push all the air, all the way out... just how easy it is for the 'breath in' to be full and rich and deep, without you even having to try. How easy it is to breathe deep breaths by making the breath out just as long or even longer than the breath in.

Now just gently return to breathing lovely long slow breaths, with the breath out just as long as or even longer than the breath in.

Breathing long, slow, quiet, deep, breaths with the 'breath out' being as long as, or even slightly longer than your breath in. Breathing long slow breaths.

Again, count your breath over a one-minute period and record them here

Let's compare this number of breaths with the number of breaths you made before the breathing exercise.....

Extremely nervous Breathing about 35 -- 40 breaths per minute	Nervous Breathing about 18 -- 28 breaths per minute
Normal Breathing about 12 -- 18 breaths per minute	Calm Breathing about 6 -- 8 breaths per minute

Yoga Breathing Exercise No.2

This exercise is useful if you want something more to focus on when you are practising slow breathing. You have to count, so it helps to keep the 'wandering mind' busy.

The original yoga exercise suggests that you place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue behind your upper front teeth, keeping it there throughout the whole exercise. It does help you to keep a slightly relaxed jaw & the Eastern reasoning relates to the point behind your teeth being an important acupuncture point. You do that, or not, simply depending upon how comfortable it feels. If you do choose to place. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue.

- First exhale completely through your mouth, making a Whoosh sound.
- Next close your mouth and **inhale** quietly through your nose to a **mental count of 4**.
- Next **hold your breath for a count of 7**.
- Then **exhale** completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to **the count of 8**.
- **This is one breath.**
- Now inhale again and repeat the cycle **3** more times for a total of 4 breaths.

Note that you always inhale quietly through your nose and exhale audibly through your mouth. The tip of your tongue stays in position the whole time.

Exhalation takes twice as long as inhalation.

The absolute time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important.

If you have trouble holding your breath, speed the exercise up but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8 for the 3 phases. With practise you can slow it all down and get used to inhaling and exhaling more and more deeply.

This exercise is subtle when you first try it, but it gains in power with repetition and practice.

- Do it at least twice per day. You cannot do it too frequently.
- But, for the first month, keep it simple & each time you do it, don't do more than 4 breaths. You can increase it to 8 breaths later.
- If you feel a little light-headed initially, don't be concerned as it will pass as you practice.
- Use it whenever you become aware of internal tension.
- Use it to help you calm.
- Use it to help you fall asleep.