

Breathing Mindfully

Conscious breathing helps release tension, increase focus and concentration, and restore balance during challenging moments. Practice regularly—in any position—with kind, caring attention toward your body and yourself. Grow your practice slowly and observe which techniques are most useful.

Diaphragmatic Breathing (3-part breath)

As you inhale, expand the belly, ribs and chest (in that order or all at once). Exhale slowly, releasing the chest, ribs and belly. Allow the breath to flow continuously through all three parts, including the back. You may even imagine expanding and releasing the head and pelvic floor. Practice 3-10 breath cycles and notice the effects.

BENEFITS: Brings in vital life force and oxygenates the blood. Can be a calming practice during stressful times, and helps bring you to the present moment anytime.



4:7:8 Breathing

- Place the tip of the tongue just behind the upper teeth.
- Inhale through the nose and exhale with a whooshing sound through pursed lips.
- Using the deep, 3-part breath (above), count 4 beats on the inhalation, hold for 7 beats, and exhale for 8 beats.
- Practice 4 rounds 2-3 times daily for 4 weeks and slowly increase to 8 rounds 2-3 times daily.
- Practice just before meals, or whenever you feel anxious or stressed.

BENEFITS: Can significantly reduce stress and anxiety.

Alternate Nostril Breathing



HAND POSITION: Make a gentle fist with the right hand and release the thumb and the last two fingers to create Vishnu Mudra. OR simply place index and middle fingers on forehead between eyebrows.

STAGE 1: Close the right nostril with the thumb and exhale slowly through the left. Inhale slowly through the left using the 3-part breath. Change nostrils by closing the left nostril with the ring finger and pinky and release the thumb. Exhale through the right side. Continue the pattern of exhale, inhale, change sides. Focus on the breath, and deep within. Practice for up to three minutes at a time.

STAGE 2: Once you are comfortable with Stage 1, measure the time of your inhalations and exhalations, slowly creating a ratio of 1:2. For example, if you inhale for a count of five, exhale for a count of ten.

BENEFITS: Balances the nervous system, creates a calm and alert mind, and aids in sound sleep.



Rapid Diaphragmatic Breath

To exhale, squeeze in the belly rapidly, and release the air through your nose like you're blowing out a candle. To inhale, release the belly and allow the air to return automatically. Find your own pace and keep it steady. If you become dizzy, return to a gentle breath. Practice three rounds, beginning with 10-15 expulsions in each round, gradually increasing the number of breaths over time.

BENEFITS: Can be energizing and centering, cleanses the energy channels and helps release toxins.

Breath Awareness Meditation

Bring your attention to your natural breathing without trying to change or manipulate it. Just notice sensations as your breath passes through the nostrils or moves the abdomen.

When you realize your mind has wandered, there's no need to judge yourself; it's the nature of the mind to think. Simply notice where your attention has gone, acknowledge it and bring your focus back to the experience of breathing.

It's helpful to set a timer for a period of formal meditation. And, informally throughout the day, pause and pay attention to your breath to recharge and reconnect with yourself.



Options:

- Start with a few deep breaths to settle in. Then observe and experience the natural breath rhythm.
- Count exhalations from 1 to 10; when you reach 10 or lose track, just begin again.
- Count how many breaths you take in a minute. Stop and observe that many breaths as a mini-meditation before getting out of bed, before a meal or any transition .

BENEFITS: Mindfulness meditation is a formal practice of essentially focusing your mind on the present moment experience and noting your experience without trying to change it. Meditation can help reduce stress because it allows you to observe your habitual reactions to stressors and respond consciously and with compassion, rather than getting caught up in the constant activity of the mind.

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