

Breathing Exercises

Paying attention to how we breathe can often be overlooked because it's completely automatic. However, becoming aware of and incorporating breathing exercises into our daily routine has many benefits, including promoting calmness, increasing focus, and performing your best.

Breathing Breaks

Several times a day, take breathing breaks to help refresh your energy, let go of distractions, and increase focus.

- Stand and take a deep breath while your raising arms slowly over your head.
- Exhale as you lower your arms. Repeat 3 times.

Paced Breathing

Paced Breathing is a technique that can help to activate stress reduction mechanisms in the body by promoting a harmonious state between your respiration system and your heart.

- The basic technique is to inhale for a count of 2-4 seconds and exhale for a count of 4-6 seconds. Find the combination that works for you, making sure to exhale longer than you inhale.
- Focus your attention on a specific object, image, sound or even your breath to free your mind from distractions.
- Begin by taking a normal breath and then take a deep breath. Breathe in slowly through your nose, letting your chest and lower belly expand. Breathe out slowly through your mouth, pursing your lips and making a swoosh sound.
- If your mind wanders, gently redirect your focus back to the counting and breathing.
- Using a breathing app in the beginning can help serve as a breathing coach. Eventually, the paced breathing will become second nature.

Free Paced Breathing Apps:

iPhone:
Breathe Deep

Android:
Paced Breathing

Abdominal Breathing Technique

This technique can help create a feeling of calm composure, renewed energy, and focus.

- While sitting, with one hand on the chest and the other on the belly, take a deep breath in through the nose, ensuring the diaphragm (not the chest) inflates with enough air to create a stretch in the lungs.
- Exhale slowly through pursed lips. Initially repeat 3 times. You can work up to 6-10 deep, slow breaths per minute for 2-3 minutes.



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Breathing Exercises (continued)

4-4-8 Breathing

The 4-4-8 Breathing technique is great to use when you feel stressed or tense because it can help to calm the nervous system, clear the head of distractions and reduce stress.

- While sitting, breathe in through your nose for a count of 4, taking the breath into your stomach.
- Hold your breath for a count of 4.
- Release your breath through your mouth with a whooshing sound for a count of 8.
- Without a break, breathe in again for a count of 4, repeating the entire technique 3-4 times in a row.
- Focus on counting when breathing in, holding the breath, and breathing out.

Simple Yoga Breathing

Yoga breathing is relaxing and can be used anytime to help with a relaxation response, including when stretching during yoga.

- Sit or lie down comfortably, resting your hands below your navel.
- Tune in to the way you breathe. Inhale and exhale naturally through your nose for a few minutes, noticing the slight rise and fall of your hands. Consider the way the air feels as it enters and exits your nostrils.
- Start to count silently forward (1, 2, 3...), then backward (... 3, 2, 1) as you breathe in and out.
- Gradually make each exhalation twice as long as each inhalation. Focus on breathing slowly and smoothly, humming each time you exhale. The slight vibration can be very soothing.

Laugh

It's true what they say – laughter really is the best medicine. A hearty chuckle can stimulate circulation and soothe tension. Laughter also increases endorphins released by the brain and produces a relaxed feeling.

- Surround yourself with a few items that make you laugh – a funny cartoon, funny photos, or a fun toy.
- Share stories with co-workers. A willingness to laugh at yourself sometimes can also serve as a good reminder not to take life so seriously, which can do wonders for your stress level.

Note: Individuals can sometimes experience dizziness when practicing breathing exercises. With practice, dizziness usually goes away. If holding the breath or any part of the breathing exercise feels uncomfortable, reduce it down to just a few seconds.



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