

# Fostering Wellness Exercise

## Diaphragmatic Breathing

Time Required: 2-5 minutes

Find a comfortable place where you can sit easily with minimal disturbance. Arrange what is around you so that you are reminded you are in a peaceful space. Find a seat where you can easily be upright without forcing your body in to an unnatural posture. Let your body be firmly planted to the earth or seat, your hands resting easily, your heart soft, your eyes gently closed. Bring attention to the sensations of your breathing. Take a few deep breaths in through the nose and out through the nose to sense where you can feel the breath most easily, where you can feel the movement of the chest or rise and fall of the belly.

1. *Place one hand over your heart and one hand on the abdomen.*
2. *Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out against your hand. The hand over your heart should remain as still as possible.*
3. *Breathe out slowly, feeling the muscles of the abdominal wall tighten, letting them contract inward and upward toward the spine.*
4. *The hand over your heart should still remain as still as possible.*
5. *Count your breaths from 1-10. Repeat this cycle for a total of 10 breaths; ten inhalations and ten exhalations.*

After a few breaths, your mind will probably start to wander. When you notice this, no matter how long or short a time you have been away, simply come back to the sensation of the next breath and start again from one. As you sit, let this slow rhythm of your breath activate the parasympathetic nervous system to slow down your heart beat and soothe your racing mind. <sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Jerath R, Edry JW, Barnes VA, Jerath V (2006) Physiology of long pranayamic breathing: neural respiratory elements may provide a mechanism that explains how slow deep breathing shifts the autonomic nervous system. *Med Hypotheses* 67:566–571.

## Slow Deep Breathing

Time Required: *2-5 minutes*

We are typically taught there are two phases to the breath, the inhale and the exhale. Actually, there are four parts: inhalation, the space of breath retention at the top of the inhale, exhalation, and the space of breath retention at the bottom of the exhale. Normally these pauses are barely noticeable, but if you can extend them, you can work to quiet the chatter in the mind and improve concentration.

Settle into a comfortable seat. If you are in a chair, lift the spine tall and plant your feet on the floor. If you are sitting with legs crossed, avoid rounding in the back and collapsing through the ribs. Without sticking the ribs out, feel expansive through the lungs. Inhale deeply through the nose, exhale fully through the nose. Inhale deeply through the nose for a count of four (1...2...3...4) until the lungs are full. Hold at the top of the inhale for a count of four (1...2...3...4), keeping the lips sealed. Exhale evenly through the nose for a steady count of six (1...2...3...4...5...6) until the lungs are completely empty. When the lungs are empty, hold here for a count of two (1...2). Repeat this series four times. If the length of the in breath or breath retention become uncomfortable, change them to a count of three.

Inhale through the nose for four (1...2...3...4), hold for four (1...2...3...4). Exhale through the nose for six (1...2...3...4...5...6) and hold out for two (1...2).

Inhale through the nose for four (1...2...3...4), hold for four (1...2...3...4). Exhale through the nose for six (1...2...3...4...5...6) and hold out for two (1...2).

Inhale through the nose for four (1...2...3...4), hold for four (1...2...3...4). Exhale through the nose for six (1...2...3...4...5...6) and hold out for two (1...2).

Return to your regular breath and notice any shifts in your thoughts. Do you feel more focused? Is your heart beating slower now that you have activated the parasympathetic nervous system with this slow, deep breathing?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Image retrieved from <https://pixabay.com/en/soap-bubble-breath-bubble-1101630/> on July 9, 2017.

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<sup>3</sup> Protin, Corey and Kakoyiannis, Alana. "Here's the breathing technique that soldiers use to stay calm in the field." Business Insider. October 21, 2016. <<http://www.businessinsider.com/soldiers-breathing-technique-stay-calm-2016-10>>

# Alternate Nostril Breathing

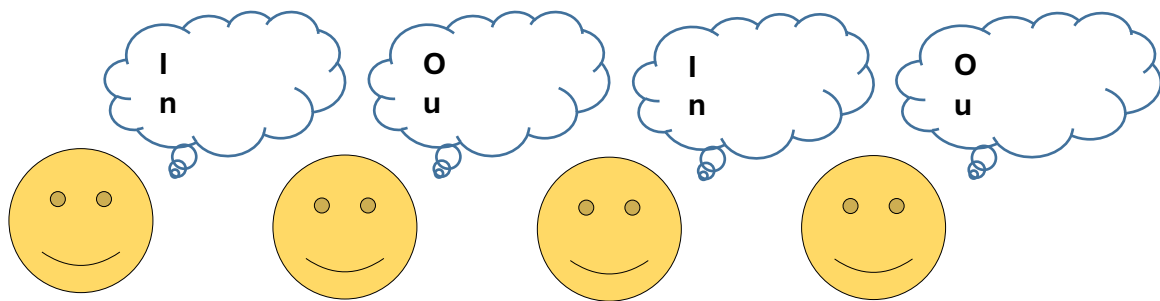
Time Required: *2-5 minutes*

Find a comfortable seat, whether on a chair with your feet firmly rooted to the earth, or with legs crossed and spine upright. Do not force your body into an unnatural posture, but imagine the spine lengthening down through the tailbone and up through the crown. Rest your hands easily and close your eyes gently. If you feel any sinus pressure or congestion, make sure to blow your nose well before beginning this exercise.

Bring your right hand in front of your face, palm facing your nose. Take a deep breath in through the nose; exhale fully through the nose. With the right hand, bring your thumb to close the right nostril. Inhale slowly and steadily through the left nostril. At the top of the inhale, close the left nostril with the ring finger. Release the thumb from the right nostril and exhale slowly through the right nostril only. Keeping the fingers where they are, inhale through the right nostril. Close off the right nostril with the right thumb and release the ring finger from the left nostril, exhale through the left nostril.

Inhale through the left. Close the left nostril with the ring finger, release the thumb. Exhale through the right. Inhale through the right. Close the right nostril with the thumb, release the ring finger. Exhale through the left.

Repeat this exercise in your own time for a total of 7 cycles, trying to match the length of the inhale with the length of the exhale. End with an exhale on the left. Alternate nostril breathing is a very cleansing breath meant to quiet the chatter of the mind. By closing off each nostril in succession, you are activating alternate hemispheres of the brain to bring them in balance. Inhale deeply and fully through both nostrils. Exhale everything out. <sup>4</sup>



## Balanced Breathing

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<sup>4</sup> Ghiya, Shreya and Lee, C Mattew. "Influence of alternate nostril breathing on heart rate variability in non-practitioners of yogic breathing." *Int J Yoga*. 2012 Jan-Jun; 5(1): 66–69. doi: 10.4103/0973-6131.91717

Time Required: *2-5 minutes*

Sit upright, feet firmly planted to the earth or sit comfortably with legs crossed. Lengthen through the spine to draw the tailbone down and the crown up. Hug the ribs in so the spine is straight. Notice the breath. Does it feel warm or cool through the nose? Is it long or short? Shallow or deep? Take note of these qualities without altering the breath. Notice if the inhale is shorter than the exhale. If it is, can you lengthen it? While you breathe in, quietly tell yourself "I am breathing in." While you are breathing out, repeat in your mind "I am breathing out."

On your next breath in, begin to lengthen it to match the exhale. Breathe in for a count of four (1...2...3...4) and breathe out for a count of four (1...2...3...4). If this feels very comfortable, lengthen the inhale to match the exhale, increasing your count to 5. Inhale 1...2...3...4...5 and exhale for 1...2...3...4...5. Continue to increase the length of each breath in your own time to 6, 7, or even 8, but do not stretch the breath past the point of feeling comfortable. Once you have taken 10 long, deep inhales and exhales, return to your normal breathing.

How does your body feel? Does the breath feel warmer? Louder? Longer? Is your heart beating slower? Are your eyes more relaxed? Is your spine still straight? <sup>5</sup>

## Energizing Breath

Time Required: *2 minutes*

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<sup>5</sup> Patricia L. Gerbarg, MD and Richard P. Brown, MD. Neurobiology and Neurophysiology of Breath Practices in Psychiatric Care. November 30, 2016, Psychiatric Times

This breathing exercise is meant to warm you up when you are feeling cold, wake you up when you are feeling tired (but still need to get work done) and release negative emotions. It consists of a series of forceful exhalations followed by passive inhalation. It is important to remember that this exercise should not be practiced if you are pregnant. If you feel any sinus pressure or congestion, make sure to blow your nose well before beginning.

Sit comfortably with legs crossed and spine upright, or if you are in a chair, plant the soles of your feet to the earth. Rest your hands comfortably, one on top of the other, on the low belly. Keep in mind that you can practice this at a slow pace to start and build up speed over time if you feel comfortable.

Take a deep breath in through your nose to feel your lungs and rib cage expand fully. Exhale through your mouth. Inhale again deeply through the nose, feeling the belly become round with air. Quickly, forcefully expel all the air from the abdomen through your nose, drawing the navel in and up toward the spine, feeling the belly draw in toward your hands. The primary movement you should feel is from the diaphragm. Allow the lungs to expand passively, without exerting effort. As you start to build up speed, this exercise feels close to a dog's panting. Repeat the cycle for 30 seconds, ending on an exhale.

Allow your breath to return to normal for 30 seconds. Observe the sensations and change in energy within your body. Repeat the cycle again of rapid, forceful exhalations and passive inhalations for 30 seconds, then rest for 30 seconds. Repeat once more.<sup>6</sup>



Hello again,

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<sup>6</sup> "Kapalbhati Pranayama." Yogawiz. 2016.  
<<http://www.yogawiz.com/pranayama/kapalbhati.html>>

<sup>7</sup> Image retrieved from: <https://pixabay.com/en/cheerful-idea-light-bulb-1296660/> on July 9, 2017. Creative Commons License associated: <https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en>

This marks the conclusion of your twelve-week study period with us. We hope that we have convinced you that practicing gratitude, optimism, social connectedness and breathing exercises increase your happiness and wellbeing. It is our goal that through this Toolkit, we have provided you with enough resources to continue practicing independently. We invite you to start the recommended cycle of exercises again, or feel free to use a combination of the above exercises as you like or your group prefers. The goal is to have these wellness sessions continue for all individuals and programs. If you have wellness champions who are graduating, ask for volunteers to take their place.