

JUST BREATHE....

SOMETIMES, THE SIMPLEST THINGS ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE

Here are a few easy and HIGHLY effective breathing exercises to immediately calm your stress response. These help activate your body's parasympathetic nervous system, which helps you de-stress and move your body and mind out of fight-or-flight mode and back to a more relaxed state. Breathing exercises as a practice is called breathwork.



Many studies have been done on breathwork's relaxing, healing and energizing effects, and its profound benefits to both the physical body and your mental state. Breathwork is simple and the fastest way to calm yourself when under duress or high anxiety. It works.

It's also one of the most accessible health practices as you can do it anywhere, and anytime for immediate reduction of stressful feelings, anxiety attacks and mental chatter. No special tools, no one really knows you're doing it, and anyone can do it. There are many different kinds of breathwork techniques. If you want a deeper dive into the history, types, and benefits, pick up a copy of James Nester's excellent book on breathing called [Breathe](#).

MINI HISTORY

We trace breathwork back to ancient Hindu practices, yoga and Ayurvedic practices. Ayurvedic is a natural system of medicine (the oldest form of healing medicine) that originated in India more than 3,000 years ago. You will see breathwork referred to as "pranayama" which stems from the Sanskrit prana meaning life force. Throughout the ages, breathing has been used for health practices and has resurfaced once again in Western society as we are considered the Animal Kingdom's worst breathers! Also, because it truly works and is very portable and simple.

WHY IT WORKS

Under stress, our breathing patterns change, and we tend to take small, shallow breaths and stop using our diaphragm to move air in and out of our lungs. Breathing like this causes us to have less oxygen in our blood. We tire more easily and are less resistant

to stress. Mostly, we are unconscious to how we breathe and sometimes even forget to breathe if we are stressed or busy.

Breathing through the nose is the best and most healthy way to breathe. Also the most natural. It's important because nose breathing warms and humidifies the air before it reaches your lungs. Your nose also filters incoming air and removes irritants. Proper breathing should also come from the stomach and diaphragm, not the chest.

Some people have a tendency to breathe through their mouths, which is not good. Although it may be necessary during an intensive workout or if you are suffering from nasal congestion. Mouth breathing can lead to bad health issues, including tooth decay, difficulty swallowing, and changes to the jaw or mouth shape. Also, mouth breathing does not humidify or clean the air like nose breathing, so it may increase the risk of developing airborne infections.

When we're relaxed, we normally breathe through our noses in a slow and even way. A relaxed breathing pattern calms the sympathetic nervous system, causing physiological changes, including:

- Lowered the heart rate and
- Lowered blood pressure
- Less stress hormones in our blood
- Less lactic acid in our muscles
- Balanced amounts of oxygen and carbon dioxide in our blood
- Increased physical energy
- Calmer feelings

Let's get started!

4 SIMPLE BREATHING PRACTICES TO GET YOU STARTED

DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING (TENSION RELEASE AND LEARNING TO BREATHE MORE DEEPLY)

Let's start with the simple breathing technique of shifting your breath from upper chest breathing to abdominal breathing. Have a seat, get comfortable and put your shoulders back to expand your chest. It can help sometimes to place one hand on your

chest and the other on your abdomen. Take a moment to notice how your upper chest and abdomen are moving while you normally breathe.

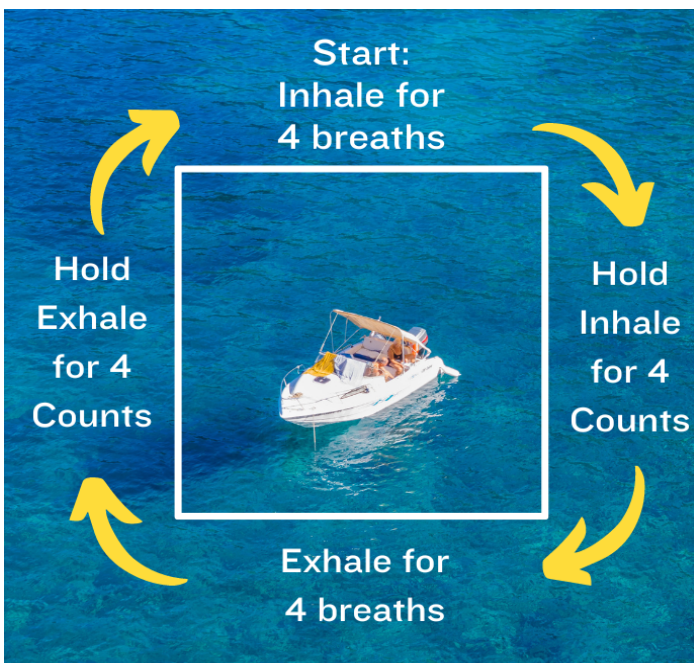
Focus on your breath and gently breathe in and out through your nose. Focus on your belly extending as you inhale keeping your upper chest still, allowing the diaphragm to work more efficiently with your abdomen rather than your chest.

As you focus, allow any tension in your body to release. Doing this thoughtfully on the out-breath sometimes helps in this practice. Once you are breathing slowly and with your abdomen, just sit quietly and enjoy the bodily sensation of the physical relaxation that accompanies this slowed breathing and mindful attention.

BOX BREATH (FOR A QUICK PICK-ME-UP, STRESS OR ANXIETY BUSTER)

If you have ever tried yoga, or are planning to, you will learn this breath. It is one of the simplest and most common forms of yogic deep breathing. Use it anytime you need a quick pick-me-up, are feeling stressed or anxious, or need some self-regulation.

It's very simple, and you use the box as a metaphor for breathing. It's basically four counts of breathing in, four counts of holding your breath, four counts of exhaling and four counts of holding after your exhale.



It's easier to silently count as you do it, and it will help you have a natural pace. Counting also serves as a sort of mantra and anchor into the present moment. You will feel an immediate relaxation and a great sense of presence to the immediate world.

When to try it: As one of the most accessible forms of breathwork, box breathing is another great anytime practice. Do it when you need a quick midday pick-me-up from your desk or when trying to chill out after somebody cuts you in line at the coffee shop.

ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATH (FOR FOCUS, CLEAR HEADEDNESS, GROUNDING)

The alternate nostril breathing technique, known in Sanskrit as *Nadī Shodhana*, is an ancient Hindu yogic breath practice. It is credited with many health benefits in the yogic tradition. It translates to “clearing the channels” and is considered one of the most powerful breathing practices known in yoga.

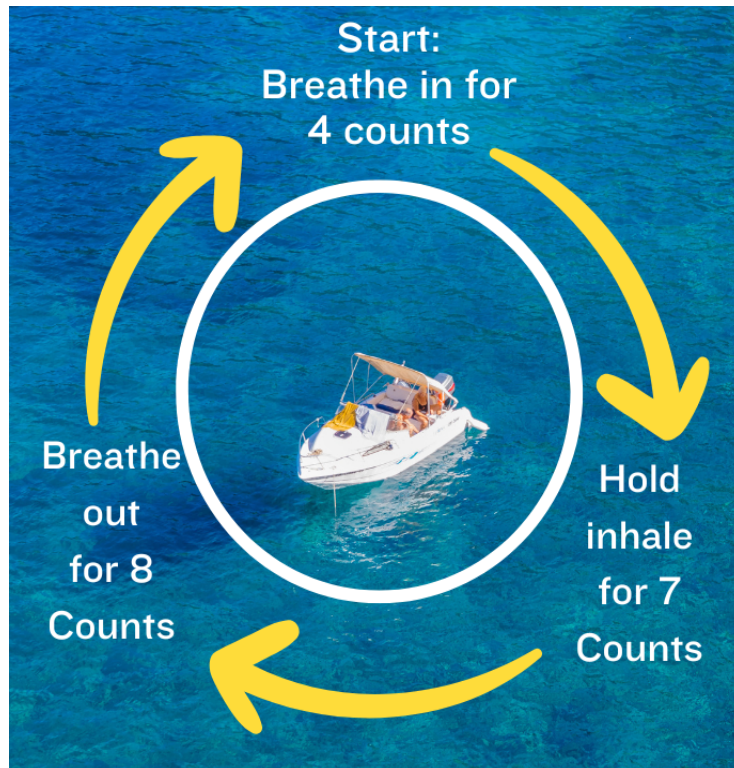


In Yogic practices (and science collaborates) right-nostril breathing is involved with higher sympathetic activity (arousal states), and left-nostril breathing is associated with parasympathetic activity (stress-reducing state).

This breath is done gently and slowly. You may have to read through it a couple times to get the rhythm and flow but it is worth it! Here’s a [video](#) in case you want to see the practice demonstrated.

1. Begin by taking a full, deep inhalation followed by a slow, gentle exhalation. Repeat a few times
2. Use the right thumb to close the right nostril and inhale through the left nostril. Exhale gently, but fully, through the left nostril. Keeping the right nostril closed, inhale through the left nostril and deep into the belly.
3. At the top of the breath, remove the right thumb from the right nostril and as you do this, use the ring and pinky fingers to close the left nostril gently. Exhale through the right nostril.
4. Exhale through the right nostril. Pause gently at the bottom of the exhalation.
5. Keeping the left nostril closed, inhale once again through the right nostril, allowing the breath to travel up the right side of the body.
6. Then again, use the right thumb to close the right nostril as you release the left nostril and exhale through the left nostril. Pause gently at the bottom of the exhalation.

4-7-8 BREATHING (FOR DEEP RELAXATION & SLEEP)



This breathing technique was developed by Dr. Andrew Weil, an integrative medicine MD, based on (once again) ancient yogic pranayama breathwork. He calls it a "natural tranquilizer for the nervous system." People use it for deep relaxation and sleep so don't practice anywhere you don't want to take a nap or spend the night!

If you're using this practice to fall asleep, lie down comfortably. Prepare by resting the tip of your tongue against the roof of your mouth, right behind your top front teeth. Keep your tongue in place throughout the practice.

Here is a [video](#) of Dr. Weil demonstrating this breath. The steps are as follows and should all be carried out in the cycle of one breath:

1. Let your lips part and make a whooshing sound, exhaling completely through your mouth.
2. Close your lips and inhale through your nose, silently counting to four
3. Hold your breath for seven seconds
4. Exhale from the mouth with another whooshing sound for eight seconds

Your next inhale initiates a new cycle of breath. Practice this pattern for four full breaths when first starting, and gradually work up to eight full breaths.

4 SIMPLE TIPS FOR STARTING A BREATHWORK PRACTICE

1. When you first start this, find someplace quiet so you can pay attention until it becomes more natural to you. The great thing about breathwork is that you can do it just about anywhere.
2. Don't worry about being in a meditative state or pressuring yourself to empty or quiet your mind before beginning the breath. You'll find that once you start paying attention to your breath, your thoughts begin to get less intrusive and pass more quickly.
3. Counting your breaths acts as sort of a mantra. It helps to do this as you breathe when you are first starting. Mantras are anchors used in meditation that help us stay present to the moment and bring us back when we wander off. Using them helps to retrain the nervous system and utilizes the brain's neuroplasticity to create new pathways.
4. Practice for a few minutes daily when you are learning the new techniques, They will become your go to practices for de-stressing as they become a comfortable part of your daily life. Practice helps retrain your body to respond to stress in a more supportive way rather than the old ways of just toughing it out or reacting.

Teaching breathwork practice is part of our Meditation + Sailing Day Retreat curriculum. If you want to expand or begin a meditation practice and learn simple, effective ways to reduce stress and anxiety in your daily life, [join us](#) on one of our retreat days. We know you will love it and love what you learn!

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