



Breathe Yourself into Calm Bliss

How you breathe really matters. Breathing correctly can profoundly change your state of mind and your health. It's as important as what you eat or how much you exercise.

Making small changes to the way you breathe is one of the most effective ways to feel better throughout your day. Deep slow breathing can help you be more relaxed, and it can ground you more into the present moment. With practice, you can breathe yourself into a state of calm bliss.

Do you breathe with your mouth or your nose?

Mouth breathing can contribute to all sorts of health problems. Make it a habit to breathe deeply through your nose. You'll feel better, and your heart, nervous system and respiratory system will function so much better when you breathe through your nose and not your mouth.

Are you breathing mostly from your chest or your belly?

Many people don't notice that they have shallow breaths coming from their chest. Shallow fast breathing from the chest is a response to stress and can keep the body in a stressed state. Slow deep belly breaths are what's needed to get into a relaxed state of health and well-being.

Here's what you can do to make sure you are breathing into your belly.

Lie down on put one hand on your belly, right over your navel. And put one hand on your chest. You want to feel your belly rise and fall with every breath. You can feel it expanding and pulling back. If you are breathing from your chest, you will feel your chest going up and down.

Focus on the smooth, rhythmic flow of your breath. Imagine your belly is like a balloon that you inflate with air as you inhale and then imagine it deflating as you exhale.

How can you be the most kind and loving to yourself while you breathe?

As you breathe in and expand your belly, what do you want to draw in along with your breath? You can simply say to yourself - I am calm, or I am peaceful or I am love.

As you exhale, what are you letting go of? What thoughts might you exhale that don't serve you? When you slow down your breathing - those anxious thoughts or the thoughts that say you're not good enough - can slow down as well. As you breathe them out, you can say, "you are not invited here, and you are no longer welcome."

Or simply relax, trust, and let your belly breathe you.

Optimal Relaxed Breathing

Inhale gently through your nose for 5 seconds, expanding your belly, and exhale through nose for 6 seconds. This will give you about 6 breaths a minute, which is optimal. Focus on breathing this way throughout your day, whenever you can remember.

When you inhale count one - 1,000, two - 1,000, three -1,000, four - 1,000, five -1,000. That's an inhalation.

When you exhale count back six – 1000, five - 1,000, four - 1,000, three - 1,000, two - 1,000, one - 1,000. That's an exhale.

Square Breathing (also known as box breathing)

Square breathing is a simple stress-management technique. You can do this anytime you feel stressed.

Exhale for a count of 4, letting all the air out of your lungs
Hold for a count of 4
Inhale for count of 4
Hold for count of 4
Repeat

4-7-8 Breath Cycle

This breathing technique (originated by Dr. Andrew Weil) induces an even more powerful relaxation response. Dr Weil refers to it as a "natural tranquilizer for the nervous system".

Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there through the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward.

1. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
2. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
3. Hold your breath for a count of seven.

4. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight. This is one breath.
5. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four 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 three phases. With practice you can slow it all down and get used to inhaling and exhaling more and more deeply.

The 4-7-8 technique may make some people feel light-headed, especially at first. If this is true for you, make the times for the three phases shorter, while keeping the ratio similar to 4-7-8. Your inhale should always be about half as long as your exhale.

It's great to practice 4-7-8 breathing twice a day - in the morning and before bed. Or whenever you feel stressed throughout your day. If practiced regularly it can help you sleep better at night.