

# healthline



## 10 Breathing Techniques

*If you're interested in trying breathing exercises to reduce stress or anxiety, or improve your lung function, we've got 10 different ones to sample. You may find that certain exercises appeal to you right away. Start with those so that the practice is more enjoyable.*

### **How to add breathing exercises to your day**

Breathing exercises don't have to take a lot of time out of your day. It's really just about setting aside some time to pay attention to your breathing. Here are a few ideas to get started:

- Begin with just 5 minutes a day, and increase your time as the exercise becomes easier and more comfortable.
- If 5 minutes feels too long, start with just 2 minutes.
- Practice multiple times a day. Schedule set times or practice conscious breathing as you feel the need.

### **1. Pursed lip breathing**

This simple breathing technique makes you slow down your pace of breathing by having you apply deliberate effort in each breath.

You can practice pursed lip breathing at any time. It may be especially useful during activities such as bending, lifting, or stair climbing.

Practice using this breath 4 to 5 times a day when you begin in order to correctly learn the breathing pattern.

To do it:

1. Relax your neck and shoulders.
2. Keeping your mouth closed, inhale slowly through your nose for 2 counts.
3. Pucker or purse your lips as though you were going to whistle.
4. Exhale slowly by blowing air through your pursed lips for a count of 4.

## **2. Diaphragmatic breathing**

Belly breathing can help you use your diaphragm properly. Do belly breathing exercises when you're feeling relaxed and rested.

Practice diaphragmatic breathing for 5 to 10 minutes 3 to 4 times per day.

When you begin you may feel tired, but over time the technique should become easier and should feel more natural.

To do it:

1. Lie on your back with your knees slightly bent and your head on a pillow.
2. You may place a pillow under your knees for support.
3. Place one hand on your upper chest and one hand below your rib cage, allowing you to feel the movement of your diaphragm.
4. Slowly inhale through your nose, feeling your stomach pressing into your hand.
5. Keep your other hand as still as possible.
6. Exhale using pursed lips as you tighten your stomach muscles, keeping your upper hand completely still.

You can place a book on your abdomen to make the exercise more difficult. Once you learn how to do belly breathing lying down you can increase the difficulty by trying it while sitting in a chair. You can then practice the technique while performing your daily activities.

## **3. Breath focus technique**

This deep breathing technique uses imagery or focus words and phrases.

You can choose a focus word that makes you smile, feel relaxed, or that is simply neutral to think about. Examples include peace, let go, or relax, but it can be any word that suits you to focus on and repeat through your practice.

As you build up your breath focus practice you can start with a 10-minute session. Gradually increase the duration until your sessions are at least 20 minutes.

To do it:

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable place.
2. Bring your awareness to your breaths without trying to change how you're breathing.
3. Alternate between normal and deep breaths a few times. Notice any differences between normal breathing and deep breathing. Notice how your abdomen expands with deep inhalations.
4. Note how shallow breathing feels compared to deep breathing.
5. Practice your deep breathing for a few minutes.
6. Place one hand below your belly button, keeping your belly relaxed, and notice how it rises with each inhale and falls with each exhale.
7. Let out a loud sigh with each exhale.
8. Begin the practice of breath focus by combining this deep breathing with imagery and a focus word or phrase that will support relaxation.
9. You can imagine that the air you inhale brings waves of peace and calm throughout your body. Mentally say, "Inhaling peace and calm."
10. Imagine that the air you exhale washes away tension and anxiety. You can say to yourself, "Exhaling tension and anxiety."

## **4. Lion's breath**

Lion's breath is an energizing yoga breathing practice that is said to relieve tension in your chest and face.

It's also known in yoga as Lion's Pose or simhasana in Sanskrit.

To do this:

1. Come into a comfortable seated position. You can sit back on your heels or cross your legs.
2. Press your palms against your knees with your fingers spread wide.
3. Inhale deeply through your nose and open your eyes wide.
4. At the same time, open your mouth wide and stick out your tongue, bringing the tip down toward your chin.
5. Contract the muscles at the front of your throat as you exhale out through your mouth by making a long “ha” sound.
6. You can turn your gaze to look at the space between your eyebrows or the tip of your nose.
7. Do this breath 2 to 3 times.

Here is a guided example of lion’s breath and a couple of pose variations on it.

### **5. Alternate nostril breathing**

Alternate nostril breathing, known as nadi shodhana pranayama in Sanskrit, is a breathing practice for relaxation.

Alternate nostril breathing has been shown to enhance cardiovascular function and to lower heart rate.

Nadi shodhana is best practiced on an empty stomach. Avoid the practice if you’re feeling sick or congested. Keep your breath smooth and even throughout the practice.

To do this:

1. Choose a comfortable seated position.
2. Lift up your right hand toward your nose, pressing your first and middle fingers down toward your palm and leaving your other fingers extended.
3. After an exhale, use your right thumb to gently close your right nostril.
4. Inhale through your left nostril and then close your left nostril with your right pinky and ring fingers.
5. Release your thumb and exhale out through your right nostril.
6. Inhale through your right nostril and then close this nostril.
7. Release your fingers to open your left nostril and exhale through this side.
8. This is one cycle.
9. Continue this breathing pattern for up to 5 minutes.
10. Finish your session with an exhale on the left side.

Your answers will help us improve our experience. You're the best!

### **6. Equal breathing**

Equal breathing is known as sama vritti in Sanskrit. This breathing technique focuses on making your inhales and exhales the same length. Making your breath smooth and steady can help bring about balance and equanimity.

You should find a breath length that is not too easy and not too difficult. You also want it to be too fast, so that you’re able to maintain it throughout the practice. Usually, this is between 3 and 5 counts.

Once you get used to equal breathing while seated you can do it during your yoga practice or other daily activities.

To do it:

1. Choose a comfortable seated position.
2. Breathe in and out through your nose.
3. Count during each inhale and exhale to make sure they are even in duration. Alternatively, choose a word or short phrase to repeat during each inhale and exhale.
4. You can add a slight pause or breath retention after each inhale and exhale if you feel comfortable. (Normal breathing involves a natural pause.)
5. Continue practicing this breath for at least 5 minutes.

### **7. Resonant or coherent breathing**

Resonant breathing, also known as coherent breathing, is when you breathe at a rate of 5 full breaths per minute. You can achieve this rate by inhaling and exhaling for a count of 5.

Breathing at this rate maximizes your heart rate variability (HRV), reduces stress, and, according to one 2017 study, can reduce symptoms of depression when combined with Iyengar yoga.

To do this:

1. Inhale for a count of 5.
2. Exhale for a count of 5.
3. Continue this breathing pattern for at least a few minutes.

### **8. Sitali breath**

This yoga breathing practice helps you lower your body temperature and relax your mind.

Slightly extend your breath in length but don't force it. Since you inhale through your mouth during Sitali breath, you may want to choose a place to practice that's free of any allergens that affect you and air pollution.

To do this:

1. Choose a comfortable seated position.
2. Stick out your tongue and curl your tongue to bring the outer edges together.
3. If your tongue doesn't do this, you can purse your lips.
4. Inhale through your mouth.
5. Exhale out through your nose.
6. Continue breathing like this for up to 5 minutes.

### **9. Deep breathing**

Deep breathing helps to relieve shortness of breath by preventing air from getting trapped in your lungs and helping you to breathe in more fresh air. It may help you to feel more relaxed and centered.

To do this:

1. While standing or sitting, draw your elbows back slightly to allow your chest to expand.
2. Take a deep inhalation through your nose.
3. Retain your breath for a count of 5.
4. Slowly release your breath by exhaling through your nose.

### **10. Humming bee breath (bhramari)**

The unique sensation of this yoga breathing practice helps to create instant calm and is especially soothing around your forehead. Some people use humming bee breath to relieve frustration, anxiety, and anger. Of course, you'll want to practice it in a place where you are free to make a humming sound.

To do this:

1. Choose a comfortable seated position.
2. Close your eyes and relax your face.
3. Place your first fingers on the tragus cartilage that partially covers your ear canal.
4. Inhale, and as you exhale gently press your fingers into the cartilage.
5. Keeping your mouth closed, make a loud humming sound.
6. Continue for as long as is comfortable.

### **The takeaway**

You can try most of these breath exercises right away. Take the time to experiment with different types of breathing techniques. Dedicate a certain amount of time at least a few times per week. You can do these exercises throughout the day.

Check in with your doctor if you have any medical concerns or take any medications. If you want to learn more about breathing practices you can consult a respiratory therapist or a yoga teacher who specializes in breathing practices. Discontinue the practice if you experience any feelings of discomfort or agitation.

Medically reviewed by Daniel Bubnis, M.S., NASM-CPT, NASE Level II-CSS — Written by Emily Cronkleton on April 9, 2019 (<https://www.healthline.com/health/breathing-exercise>)