



Breathing: The Life Force Energy

Benefits of Mindful Breathing

- calms the nervous system, lowers heart rate and blood pressure
- focuses and calms the mind
- assists circulation and recuperation
- encourages retention of vital energy
- improves cognitive performance, metabolism, and immunity
- deepens awareness in yoga asana to facilitate efficiency and safety

Anatomy Lesson:

A deep **inhalation** brings oxygen and energy to the heart center. This is naturally uplifting and facilitates openness, space, and lightness in the body. The **exhalation** lends a quality of looseness, ease, and relaxation. It can also be used to anchor strength. Proper use of the breath balances tension and relaxation in movement.

While practicing yoga poses, flows or inversions., maintain an unstrained breath. The movement of your breath facilitates circulation throughout the whole body. An over-active breath can create tension and strain while doing yoga asana. If your breathing is not smooth, you are probably pushing too hard; **learn to breathe evenly in poses and flows. Do not hold your breath!**

Proper breathing gently engages the abdominal muscles as the diaphragm, the engine of the breath, rises and falls under the rib cage. To allow full movement and function of the diaphragm one must learn to relax thoracic and abdominal muscles. Such **diaphragmatic breathing relaxes the nervous system almost immediately.**

Sound or Silence?

If soft music helps you relax and distracts your mind from stressful thoughts, fine. Studies show, however, that a few minutes of silence is more relaxing for the heart, and more restorative to the brain.

Breathing for Energy

Wing Breaths (see illustration at end)

Stand with feet a bit apart, easy knees, and a connection through the legs into the earth. Take a breath, bringing oxygen into the chest. Feel the natural expansion and lift of the chest. Return to normal posture as you exhale. Repeat 10 times, gradually making the movement bigger with each breath, raising the arms on the inhale and releasing down on the exhale. Breathe evenly; no breath retention.

Breathing for Relaxation

The Set Up (see illustration at end)

Lie or sit in a well-supported position with your chest and head raised slightly. The head should be higher than the chest, and the forehead higher than the chin. The tiered back set up helps turn the focus inward and allows the upper body to relax, aiding ease of breathing. This is especially important during congestion of lungs, throat, nose, sinus, and ears. Settle the body and legs. Open the chest and shoulders. If it is comfortable, rest your hands on the bottom side ribs so you can feel the movement of your breath under your hands. Soften the face and relax the eyes inward. Breathe through your nose if possible.

Improving health and well-being through thoughtful movement.

To start, take a few deep big breaths and let them all the way out with a big exhale. Notice your heartbeat...can you feel it? Now let your muscles relax. Let your bones feel heavy. Take a few minutes to simply let go and relax.

Observe your Breath

Focus your breath, feeling it move through you. Create space in the body on the inhale, and release tension on the exhale. No need to take huge breaths, which can create tension. Find middle ground. Be content just to watch your breath without making deliberate changes. Let the whole body breathe.

Observe these things about your breath:

Where do you feel the breath? Your nose & throat? Chest & ribs? Belly?

Do you feel it in the front of the body? The sides? The back?

Does your breath feel relatively slow or fast? Deep or shallow?

Are there pauses in the flow of breath?

Is the inhale or exhale longer, or are they similar?

Free your Breath: Diaphragmatic Breathing

Let your breath settle into its natural wavelike rhythm. Observe the rise and fall of the chest as your breath comes and goes. Keep the breath quiet and easy. It will gradually become slower and deeper and the mind will become quieter and more peaceful.

To deepen your breath further, relax your rib cage and your belly, allowing them to move with your breath. Notice how the belly naturally, without effort, sinks toward the spine on the exhale. Follow the exhale to its end, and notice that moment of profound emptiness, stillness, and peace. When your body says it is time, let your belly rise to allow space for the diaphragm to descend. Welcome the new inhalation without restraint.

Watch your breath and thoughts like water in a river or clouds in the sky. Watch them go by without getting caught up in them. If you lose focus, simply begin again.

Complete the Breathing Practice

Notice if your heartbeat has changed now. Has it slowed down? Are you calmer? More focused?

To come out of your relaxed position, move slowly on exhalations. Stay calm and take your time. Roll to your side and slowly come to sitting. Pause there, and find your breath again before leaving your practice.

Thank your body for breathing on its own!

