



BREATHING EXERCISES

How you breathe is important!

How we breathe has a profound effect on our life and health. Not only does it change how much oxygen is going into our bodies and how much waste is coming out of our bodies, it also effects cardiac function, immune system function, mood, stress levels, hormone levels, digestion, strength, endurance and a wide variety of other things. *In short, how you breathe can influence almost every aspect of your health and wellbeing.*

The most efficient way to breathe is diaphragmatic breathing or belly breathing. This is the predominant method of breathing in healthy infants and young children, but as we get older we tend to breathe using our chest and shoulder muscles and less of our diaphragm. The exercise below will help you to relearn the most healthful way of breathing.

Belly Breathing

If belly breathing is practiced regularly it can again become second nature to us. This is a natural way to reduce stress and improve circulation.

- Pick a comfortable position either sitting, standing or lying on your back. It might be helpful to practice this for the first few times in front of a mirror.
- If you are standing or sitting, make sure that your feet are flat on the floor and your back is straight.
- You can place your hands at your side, in your lap, or on your belly.
- Take 3 deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth, feeling stress exit your body with each exhalation.
- As you inhale, let the breath completely fill your lungs and push your belly out. (As your diaphragm contracts it pushes down on the organs of your abdomen and thus pushes your belly out.)
- Exhale completely, feeling your belly move back in as your breath leaves.
- Do a series of 7 breaths. Rest for 2 minutes and then repeat 2 more times.

Alternating Nostril Breathing

This technique is especially good for those who suffer from chronic sinusitis, allergies and lung infections.

- Sit in a comfortable position in a chair or on the floor. Press the thumb of your left hand against the left side of your nose blocking the air passage. Keep the other fingers of your hand straight, but not touching your face.
- Breathe in through your right nostril for a count of ten.
- Move your hand so that the side of your index finger closes the air passage on the right side of your nose.
- Breathe out of the left nostril for a count of ten.
- Repeat this five times.
- Switch hands. Breathe in through the left nostril and out through the right nostril for a count of ten.
- Repeat 5 times.

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Breathing Colors

This exercise is a combination of meditation and breathing. It is especially helpful for relaxation, stress reduction, high blood pressure, generalized immune stimulation and insomnia.

- With your feet parallel, shoulder width apart, slowly bend and unbend your knees.
- Each time you bend your knees to go down, breathe out.
- Each time you straighten your legs to come up, breathe in.
- Allow yourself to bend your knees as far as you can without letting your heels come off of the ground. Keep your back straight and do not bend forward at the hips.

Now, it's time to add the colors through visualization:

- As you breathe in, you will breathe in colors from the earth and the air through your feet and hands.
- Breathe in each color several times, beginning with **red**. Then repeat the same thing with each of the rest of the colors of the rainbow: **orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet and white**.
- As you breathe out, let the colors go back into your environment.

Resources

1. Brennan, Barbara Ann. *Hands of Light*. Bantam Books. New York: 1988.