

My breathing exercises

Nine ways to settle the body, five to ten minutes at a time

Breathing exercises can be helpful for a number of mental health difficulties. Spending time each day doing breathing exercises can help regulate your nervous system and bring you back to the present moment. All exercises should be practised for a duration of 5-10 minutes.

Lion's Breath

Releases tension in the face and jaw; good for frustration.

- 1 Take a deep breath through your nostrils.
- 2 Proceed to open your mouth and extend your tongue downwards towards your chin.
- 3 Following that, exhale a large breath, directing it across your tongue, and creating a "ha" sound originating from the depths of your abdomen.
- 4 Take a brief pause by breathing regularly before commencing once more.

Box Breathing

Steadying; useful before something stressful.

- 1 Start by taking a deep breath and then exhaling while counting up to four.
- 2 Afterwards, hold your breath for four seconds before slowly inhaling to the count of four.
- 3 Hold your breath for another four seconds before repeating the process again.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

The foundation for all the others.

- 1 Position one hand on your chest and the other just beneath your ribcage.
- 2 Take a gradual breath in through your nostrils, notice the air travelling downwards towards your abdomen. Your belly should expand and protrude outward while your chest stays relatively stable.
- 3 Slowly exhale for a few seconds. Notice the difference between the air in the abdomen and the air in the chest.

4-7-8 Breathing

Calming; often used at bedtime.

- 1 To begin, separate your lips and breathe out entirely through your mouth.
- 2 Subsequently, close your lips and inhale silently through your nostrils while counting to four mentally.
- 3 Afterward, hold your breath for a duration of seven seconds.
- 4 Finally, exhale again through your mouth with a whooshing sound for eight seconds.

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Exercises five to nine

Long Exhale Breathing

Calming; the long exhale slows the heart.

- 1 Take a brief inhalation, lasting approximately 2-3 seconds.
- 2 Pause momentarily during the breath for a second before gently exhaling for double the duration of your inhalation, which should be around 4-6 seconds.
- 3 Repeat this pattern for a minimum of five minutes while being attentive to any changes in your mood and levels of anxiety.

Alternate Nostril Breathing

Balancing; needs a little concentration, which helps.

- 1 Take a deep breath and exhale it entirely, then use your right thumb to close your right nostril. Inhale through your left nostril, then use your fingers to close your left nostril.
- 2 Open your right nostril and exhale completely through that side, then inhale through your right nostril and close it. Open your left nostril and exhale through that side.
- 3 Repeat this cycle, alternating between left and right nostrils.

Pursed Lips Breathing

Good when breathing feels tight or fast.

- 1 Take a deep breath through your nostrils for approximately two seconds, sensing the air moving into your abdomen. Concentrate on filling your abdomen with air.
- 2 Purse your lips, similar to blowing on hot food, and slowly breathe out, taking twice the amount of time you took to inhale.
- 3 Repeat the process.

Humming Breath

The vibration is soothing; good for a racing mind.

- 1 Choose a comfortable position either sitting or standing, ensuring that your spine is straight.
- 2 Inhale through your nostrils for a minimum of five seconds.
- 3 Then, with your mouth closed, make a humming sound, as if you are saying "hmmm," until you run out of breath.
- 4 Repeat this process between five to seven times.

Stuffed Toy Breathing

Belly breathing for children, or anyone who likes it.

- 1 Lie down on your back and put one hand on your chest while placing a stuffed toy on your belly button. Shut your eyes and let your entire body relax.
- 2 Take a gradual inhalation through your nostrils while noticing the teddy bear rise, but your chest should remain still. After breathing in deeply, hold your breath and count to three before gradually exhaling.
- 3 Repeat this exercise until you feel calm and relaxed.

A simple rule. Longer exhale than inhale calms; equal counts steady; anything with breath-holding should feel easy, never strained. If you feel dizzy, stop and breathe normally.

Breathing practice log

Rate how settled you feel before and after, 0 = not at all, 10 = completely.

What to look for. Which exercise moved the number most? That is your go-to. Keep the others for variety.

DATE	EXERCISE	MINUTES	BEFORE	AFTER	WHAT I NOTICED