

Breathing Exercises

WebMD

The way you breathe affects your whole body. Full, deep breathing is a good way to reduce tension, feel relaxed, and reduce [stress](#).

Roll breathing (also called abdominal breathing)

The object of roll breathing is to develop full use of your [lungs](#) and get in touch with the rhythm of your breathing. It can be practiced in any position, but it is best to learn it lying on your back, with your [knees](#) bent.

1. Place your left hand on your [abdomen](#) and your right hand on your chest. Notice how your hands move as you breathe in and out.
2. Practice filling your lower lungs by breathing so that your left hand goes up when you inhale and your right hand remains still. Always inhale through your nose and exhale through your [mouth](#). Keep your shoulders relaxed, and don't shrug them.
3. When you have filled and emptied your lower lungs 8 to 10 times, add the second step to your breathing: Inhale first into your lower lungs as before, and then continue inhaling into your upper chest. As you do so, your right hand will rise and your left hand will fall a little as your abdomen falls.
4. As you exhale slowly through your [mouth](#), make a quiet, whooshing sound as first your left hand and then your right hand falls. As you exhale, feel the tension leaving your body as you become more and more relaxed.
5. Practice breathing in and out in this manner for 3 to 5 minutes. Notice that the movement of your abdomen and chest is like rolling waves rising and falling in a rhythmic motion.

Practice roll breathing daily for several weeks until you can do it almost anywhere, providing you with an instant relaxation tool any time you need one.

Caution: Some people get dizzy the first few times they try roll breathing. If you begin to [hyperventilate](#) or become lightheaded, slow you're breathing. Get up slowly.

Morning breathing

Try morning breathing when you first get up in the morning to relieve muscle stiffness and clear clogged breathing passages. Then use it throughout the day to relieve back tension.

1. From a standing position, bend forward from the waist with your [knees](#) slightly bent, letting your arms dangle close to the floor.
 2. As you inhale slowly and deeply, return to a standing position by rolling up slowly, lifting your head last.
 3. Hold your breath for just a few seconds in this standing position.
 4. Exhale slowly as you return to the original position.
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COMPLETE BREATH EXERCISES

1. *Sit up straight. Exhale.*
 2. *Inhale and, at the same time, relax the belly muscles. Feel as though the belly is filling with air.*
 3. *After filling the belly, keep inhaling. Fill up the middle of your chest. Feel your chest and rib cage expand.*
 4. *Hold the breath in for a moment, then begin to exhale as slowly as possible.*
 5. *As the air is slowly let out, relax your chest and rib cage. Begin to pull your belly in to force out the remaining breath.*
 6. *Close your eyes, and concentrate on your breathing.*
 7. *Relax your face and mind.*
 8. *Let everything go.*
 9. *Practice about 5 minutes.*
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HUMMING BREATH EXERCISES

- *Follow the instructions for inhaling the COMPLETE BREATH (Steps 1-3 above).* Now, as you begin to slowly exhale, make a HUM sound. Keep making that humming sound as long as possible. Pull your stomach muscles in, squeezing out a few more seconds of humming. Then relax. Practice for 2 to 3 minutes.
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CHINESE BREATH EXERCISES

A very fine, short (though not shallow) breath exercise comes from the Chinese Tai Chi Chuan. Three short inhales are done through the nose without exhaling. On the first inhale, the arms are lifted from the sides straight out in front at shoulder height. On the second, the arms are opened out straight to the sides while still at shoulder height. And on the third, the arms are lifted straight over the head. Then, on the exhale through the mouth, the arms are moved in an arc back down to the sides. Usually, ten or twelve breaths are sufficient and will not cause light headedness. If light headedness should occur, simply stop the exercise. *This exercise also has the effect of really opening up people physically.* In subtle ways, this exercise uses the body in leading the mind and spirit to greater openness with each other and the environment.

University of Missouri HES Extension

Dr. Andrew Weil Three Breathing Exercises

"Practicing regular, mindful breathing can be calming and energizing and can even help with stress-related health problems ranging from panic attacks to digestive disorders."

Andrew Weil, M.D.

Since breathing is something we can control and regulate, it is a useful tool for achieving a relaxed and clear state of mind. I recommend three breathing exercises to help relax and reduce stress: **The Stimulating Breath, The 4-7-8 Breathing**

Exercise (also called the Relaxing Breath), and **Breath Counting**. Try each and see how they affect your stress and anxiety levels.

Exercise 1:

The Stimulating Breath (also called the Bellows Breath)

The Stimulating Breath is adapted from a yogic breathing technique. Its aim is to raise vital energy and increase alertness.

- Inhale and exhale rapidly through your nose, keeping your mouth closed but relaxed. Your breaths in and out should be equal in duration, but as short as possible. This is a noisy breathing exercise.
- Try for three in-and-out breath cycles per second. This produces a quick movement of the diaphragm, suggesting a bellows. Breathe normally after each cycle.
- Do not do for more than 15 seconds on your first try. Each time you practice the Stimulating Breath, you can increase your time by five seconds or so, until you reach a full minute.

If done properly, you may feel invigorated, comparable to the heightened awareness you feel after a good workout. You should feel the effort at the back of the neck, the diaphragm, the chest and the abdomen. Try this breathing exercise the next time you need an energy boost and feel yourself reaching for a cup of coffee.

Exercise 2:

The 4-7-8 (or Relaxing Breath) Exercise

This exercise is utterly simple, takes almost no time, requires no equipment and can be done anywhere. Although you can do the exercise in any position, sit with your back straight while learning the exercise. 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.

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of **four**.
- Hold your breath for a count of **seven**.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of **eight**.
- This is one breath. 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.

This exercise is a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system. Unlike tranquilizing drugs, which are often effective when you first take them but then lose their power over time, this exercise is subtle when you first try it but gains in power with repetition and practice. Do it at least twice a day. You cannot do it too frequently. Do not do more than four breaths at one time for the first month of practice. Later, if you wish, you can extend it to eight breaths. If you feel a little lightheaded when you first breathe this way, do not be concerned; it will pass.

Once you develop this technique by practicing it every day, it will be a very useful tool that you will always have with you. Use it whenever anything upsetting happens - before you react. Use it whenever you are aware of internal tension. Use it to help you fall asleep. This exercise cannot be recommended too highly. Everyone can benefit from it.

Exercise 3: **Breath Counting**

If you want to get a feel for this challenging work, try your hand at breath counting, a deceptively simple technique much used in Zen practice.

Sit in a comfortable position with the spine straight and head inclined slightly forward. Gently close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Then let the breath come naturally without trying to influence it. Ideally it will be quiet and slow, but depth and rhythm may vary.

- To begin the exercise, count "one" to yourself as you exhale.
- The next time you exhale, count "two," and so on up to "five."
- Then begin a new cycle, counting "one" on the next exhalation.

Never count higher than "five," and count only when you exhale. You will know your attention has wandered when you find yourself up to "eight," "12," even "19."

Try to do 10 minutes of this form of meditation.