

## **Breathing Exercises**

Breathing is something most people take for granted. However, most of us do not realize that when we are under stress we tend to hold our breath or take short, shallow breaths. Because oxygen is the most important nutrient for the heart, brain and every other major organ of the body, limiting our intake can have far reaching effects on the body. Therefore, breathing exercises can be very helpful for reducing stress, relaxing and rejuvenating the body as well as the mind. It is a major component of yoga, meditation, Lamaze and other mind-body wellness techniques.

For each of the following breathing exercises, taking a “deep breath” means breathing in air through the nose to fill the lower part of the **lungs**, then the middle part and then the upper part. “Releasing” a breath means exhaling all of the stale air from the lungs through the mouth before taking in another fresh breath. If you can find a private place to do these exercises, it can also help to make a deep “whoosh” sound as you exhale.

### ***Which breathing exercise can be done at work?***

People tend to breathe very shallowly, working for hours without taking a good, deep, cleansing breath. When people catch themselves sighing or yawning during the day, this may be a sign that the body is trying to take in more oxygen for optimal functioning. As people continue to work long hours, eating meals on the run or skipping them altogether, a short breathing exercise in the middle of the day can relieve stress and be emotionally and physically rejuvenating. Afterward, people may be surprised to find themselves getting more work done, with better quality.

Each step of this exercise can be done while sitting at a desk. The steps are as follows:

1. Take a deep breath as you drop your chin toward your chest, touching the chest if possible. Exhale as you gently raise your head slowly to an upright position. Repeat as desired. It may also be helpful to do some “head rolls,” in which the head is rolled slowly to the right, to the chest, to the left, and to the chest in a semicircle.
2. Take a deep breath as you stretch your arms over your head. Hold your breath and the stretch for a few seconds, and then release both slowly.
3. Take a deep breath as you stretch your arms out in front of you. Hold your breath and the stretch for a few seconds, and then release both slowly.
4. Take a deep breath as you stretch your arms behind you. Hold your breath and the stretch for a few seconds, and then release both slowly.

### ***Which breathing exercise can be done before sleep?***

Thinking about stressful situations before going to sleep can trigger the stress response, which is the exact opposite of what the body requires in order to wind down and go to sleep. A breathing exercise can help people turn their attention from their racing thoughts

to their hard-working body's need for sleep. The following breathing exercise may be done with soft music, nature sounds (e.g., ocean waves) or a relaxation tape playing in the background. It may also be done in conjunction with a **relaxation exercise** or **meditation exercise**.

Each step of this exercise can be done while lying in bed. The steps are as follows:

1. Close your eyes and take three deep, cleansing breaths. Focus on inhaling clean air and exhaling stale air.
2. Continuing to breathe deeply, spend a few moments focusing your attention on your toes. You will have fully focused your attention on this part of your body when you can mentally visualize the position of each toe. This, in itself, can be quite relaxing as attention shifts from the mind to the body.
3. Breathe fresh air into the toes, fingertips, scalp and every other part of the body. Exhale stale air from all of those locations, feeling warm and cleansed.

If attention wanders, go back to the second step, re-focusing on the toes before beginning the process again. If necessary, keep your attention on the toes, skipping the third step of the exercise entirely. Different strategies will be more helpful for different people. It may take some time to find a strategy that works best for you.



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