

Breathing Practice

Alternate Nostril Breathing

Sit in a chair or comfortably on the floor with your back straight. Essentially, what you will be doing in this exercise is breathing in one nostril and out the other, then in the second nostril and out the first. In other words, you will breathe in the left nostril to the count of six, using your finger to hold the right nostril closed. Hold the breath for three counts. Then release the right nostril and breathe out the count of six, closing off the left nostril with your finger, and breathing in the right for six counts. Hold for three counts. Then release the flow of air through your nostrils six times, you will experience an unbelievable sense of relaxation, and the balancing effect this will have on your brain will be miraculously tranquilizing. A tremendous peace and harmony will come into your being.

You can do this exercise as often as you wish, but you should try to do it at least once a day. It is especially helpful before a meeting or in preparation for a stressful and emotionally charged event.

This breathing exercise can be used as a highly effective tool to balance your nervous system. In each of our nostrils, there are nerves that lead into the center of the brain. The brain has two sides. The right side is creative, inspirational, and relaxing. The left side is mechanical and calculating. The yogis have found that there is body rhythm in which every hour and twenty-eight minutes the sides of the brain alternate dominance. The nostrils reflect this. One nostril will also be dominant during this period. If the right side of the brain – the healing, resting side – is dominant, the left nostril will also be dominant. If the left side of the brain – the mechanical calculator – is dominant, the right nostril will be dominant.

In our typical fast-paced Western life style, most of our time is spent employing the mechanical and calculating activity of the left-brain. It is difficult in our society to structure one's life for the creative, inspirational, healing, and relaxing activities of the right brain. These do not harmonize with the frenetic qualities of the American lifestyle, especially in the cities. Our very lifestyle forces an imbalance between the two sides of the brain, which creates a great deal of tension in our lives. By understanding that each nostril connects to the opposite side of the brain and using this information in a breathing exercise, you can actually balance the two sides of the brain, and the result is an amazing sense of equilibrium.

Reset Breath

Breathe out completely, allowing your lungs to empty. Then, allow your lungs to refill naturally.

4 Square Breathing

Breathe in to a count of 4.
Hold to a count of 4.
Breathe out to a count of 4.
Hold for a count of 4.
Repeat 3-4 times

7/11 Breath

Breathe in slowly to a count of 7 and out to a count of 11. Then breathe naturally. Repeat as needed.

***Check out the COPE section of our website at caps.wcu.edu for helpful videos, recordings, and more!*

Belly (or Diaphragmatic) Breathing

You can do this exercise in any position, but it is helpful to do this exercise while lying down when first learning belly breathing.

1. Lie comfortably on your back, with a pillow under your head, your knees bent and your back flat. You can stretch your legs out if that's more comfortable.
2. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your upper chest.
3. Inhale slowly and expand your belly as you breathe so that your lower hand moves with your belly. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
4. Slowly exhale, focusing on the movement of your belly and lower hand as it returns to its original position.
5. Repeat steps 3 & 4 for several minutes, always focusing on the movement of the belly as you breathe. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

Breath-Counting Exercise

This exercise focuses on the use of counting with the rhythm of the breath.

Start with a short period of time and gradually increase the time.

Set a timer so that you don't have to worry about when to stop.

1. Find a comfortable position. Take several deep breaths and settle into yourself. You may either close your eyes or keep them open, depending on your own comfort. If you keep them open, fix them on an object or a spot on the floor about four feet in front of you. Your eyes may either be focused or unfocused.
2. Take deep, comfortable breaths. Notice your inhalation. The pause between inhaling and exhaling, your exhalation, and the pause before starting again.
3. As you inhale, count, "one..." As you exhale, count, "two..." Inhale, "three..." Exhale, "four..." Continue until you reach 10 then start over.
4. If you lose count, simply begin with "one" on your next inhalation.
5. If you notice your mind has wandered, gently notice this and return your focus back to counting your breath.
6. If you notice any body sensations catching your attention, focus on that sensation until it fades. Then return your attention back to counting your breaths.