

## **Breathing and Meditation Techniques**

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### **Breathing Techniques for Anxiety**

#### 1. Alternate Nostril Breathing

Alternate nostril breathing, also known as *nadi shodhana*, is a simple breathing technique that is often used to calm any anxieties before yoga or a meditation session.

To practice alternate nostril breathing, assume a seated position with good posture that opens up your chest. Next, take the index and middle fingers of your right hand and rest them next to each other between your eyebrows (you can do this with your left hand if you feel more comfortable).

Now you're ready to practice alternate nostril breathing:

1. Use your thumb to close the right-hand nostril and inhale slowly through only your left nostril.
2. Pinch your nose closed by bringing your ring finger to your left nostril. Temporarily hold your breath.
3. Open up your right nostril by removing your thumb and exhale.
4. Hold for a moment before inhaling again through the right nostril.
5. Pinch your nose closed again and hold your breath for a moment.
6. Now open up the left nostril and exhale. Again, wait a moment before you inhale.

That is one cycle of alternate nostril breathing, which can take anywhere up to a minute. Repeat the process for about 10 minutes or until you feel suitably calmed.

#### 2. Lion's Breath

Like alternate nostril breathing, lion's breath is a yogic breathing (or *pranayama*) exercise that's predominantly done during a yoga session. However, its ability to alleviate stress makes it useful for anyone looking for a breathing exercise to calm themselves.

This one is done by sitting, either in a chair or on the floor, with your hands on your knees or flat on the floor.

1. Spread your fingers wide and inhale through your nose.
2. Open your mouth and stick out your tongue. Stretch it down to your chin.
3. Do a big exhale, pushing the air across your tongue and making a "ha" sound from the depths of your abdomen.
4. Take a short break by breathing normally before starting again.

Repeat the cycle several times to see the benefits. Yogic breathing practices like lion's breath are proven to work effectively as a stress reducer. [Research of healthcare workers](#) in India showed how pranayama practices saw a reduction in perceived stress levels.

### 3. 4-4-4 Breathing

4-4-4 breathing, commonly known as box breathing, is one of the easier breathing techniques you can practice to [help you calm anxiety](#). It's perfect as a quick fix for reducing stress by distracting your mind and body. In fact, if you've taken a minute to breathe deeply then you've likely come close to box breathing.

1. Take a breath then exhale on the count of four.
2. Hold your breath for four seconds.
3. Inhale to the count of four.
4. Hold your breath for four seconds.

A few rounds of box breathing should help to keep a raised heart rate down and distract you from the anxiety-inducing situation around you. Sitting down with an extended spine and open chest is the best way to practice this technique, but it can be done stood up too.

### 4. 4-7-8 Breathing

Also known as relaxing breath, 4-7-8 breathing follows the same principles as 4-4-4 breathing. Get yourself in a seated position, either in a chair or cross-legged on the floor or your bed.

1. Inhale to the count of four.
2. Hold your breath for seven seconds.
3. Exhale to the count of eight.

Relaxing breath is the perfect pre-bedtime breathing technique, reducing feelings of tension and anxiety to help you get a better night's sleep.

### 5. Pursed-Lip Breathing

For many breathing techniques, pursed lips can help to make your breathing more effective and purposeful. Pursed lips also have a dedicated technique of their own. You can do this when sat down or when you're active.

1. Take a breath in slowly through your nose for two seconds. Keep your mouth closed.
2. Purse your lips, as if you were about to whistle or sip through a straw.
3. Exhale through your mouth while counting to four.

This technique is especially good at slowing the pace of your breath and limiting the distress caused by shortness of breath. Once you've mastered this technique, your breathing will be more efficient, helping your body do less work when breathing.

## 6. Diaphragmatic Breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing, or belly breathing, is a breathing technique with plenty of research supporting its benefits. Research published in [Frontiers in Psychology](#) said it can reduce negative subjective and physiological consequences of stress in healthy adults.

To practice it, take a seated position or lie down.

1. Place one hand on your chest and one just below your ribcage on your abdomen.
2. Slowly breathe in through your nose, feeling the air move down to your abdomen.
3. As you do, your belly will expand and push outwards but your chest should remain relatively still.
4. Purse your lips and exhale slowly for a few seconds.
5. Throughout, take note of how your stomach expands and contracts, but your chest makes only slight movements.

For maximum effect, repeat this cycle a few times.

## 7. Resonance Breathing

Resonance breathing, or coherent breathing, is another great way to reduce anxiety, respond positively to stress and bring about a more relaxed self. To start resonance breathing, lie down flat and close your eyes.

1. Breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of six. Be careful not to fully inflate your lungs.
2. Gently exhale for six seconds.
3. Throughout the process (around 10 minutes), focus on your body and how it feels as the air passes in and out.

Evidence shows that resonance breathing can have positive effects on a wide range of anxiety, stress and mood related modifiers. Research from [Brigham Young University](#) showed positive outcomes for heart rate variability, reduced blood pressure response to stress, and a more positive mood.

## 8. Long Exhaling

Longer exhalations can help you to combat your fight-or-flight stress response and improve your heart rate variability – which over time can help us to deal better with stress. This is what recent research ([summarized by Psychology Today](#)) in the industry has discovered. As a breathing technique, it means exhaling out for longer than you inhale.

1. Inhale for a short period, around 2-3 seconds.
2. Pause at the top of the breath for a second.
3. Exhale gently for double the time of your inhale, so around 4-6 seconds.

4. Continue for at least five minutes and monitor your mood and feelings of anxiety for any improvements.

When we're stressed, too many big inhalations can lead us to engage our fight-or-flight instincts and hyperventilate. This technique, which can be done stood up, lying down or sitting, can help to keep those overwhelming feelings at bay.

## 9. Teddy Bear Breathing

Teddy bear breathing is very similar to diaphragmatic breathing, but adds a child's toy into the exercise in order to engage younger people.

1. Place one hand on your chest. Place a teddy bear or toy on your belly and hold it with your other hand.
2. Slowly breathe in through your nose, feeling the air move down to your tummy.
3. As you do, your belly will expand and push the bear outwards. Your chest should stay almost where it is.
4. Purse your lips and exhale slowly for a few seconds.
5. Throughout, take note of how the bear moves up and down with your belly, but your chest makes only slight movements.

You could try this one with your children, helping them to become more aware of their breathing and less worried about the world around them.

## Benefits of Breathing Exercises

Many of the breathing exercises above have benefits that have been extensively researched. The science behind why they work revolves around the vagus nerve, which is a part of your brain that is activated when you breathe deeply. The vagus nerve oversees your mood, digestion and heart rate. Tailored breathing exercises like these stimulate your vagus nerve, helping us respond better to stress and anxiety.

When you practice a breathing exercise, you'll benefit from:

- A more relaxed body
- A lowered heart rate
- Distraction from anxiety
- Lowered blood pressure
- Stress reduction
- Slower breathing for better energy conservation

## **MEDITATIONS:**

### **Mindful Breathing**

The intention of this brief exercise is to focus your attention on your breath as you allow thoughts and sensations to come and go in the background. Find a comfortable place to sit. Put your feet flat on the ground and try to straighten your posture. Gently close your eyes. Let your shoulders drop down and away from your ears. Pay attention to your breathing and just allow yourself to continue to breathe naturally. Now, rest your hands gently on your belly with the fingertips of each hand lightly touching in the middle.

Breathe in smoothly through your nose. And exhale slowly through your mouth. Continue to take slow, smooth breaths. When you breathe in, notice your belly push your hands gently apart, as you fill your lower lungs with air. When you breathe out, notice your belly sink back towards your spine as you release your breath. You can imagine that your belly is a balloon. Fill it with air and then watch it deflate. Now continue to focus on the gentle inhalation and exhalation of your breath. In...and out...

If any other thoughts or images come into your mind during this exercise, just notice them, and gently bring your attention back to your breath. You may also become aware of physical sensations or feelings in your body. Simply notice them, and then again, bring your mind back to your breath. You don't need to analyze or give these thoughts or feelings any meaning in this moment. Simply acknowledge them without judgment and bring your mind back to your breath.

It's normal for your mind to wander. Simply notice that your mind has wandered and gently bring your attention back to your breath. Continue to focus on your breathing and stay in this relaxed state for as long as you like. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and bring your attention back to your surroundings.

12-Minute Meditation: A Guided Practice for Moving On -- <https://www.mindful.org/a-meditation-for-moving-on/>

A Basic Mindfulness Meditation for Labeling Thoughts and Emotions -- <https://www.mindful.org/a-basic-mindfulness-meditation-for-labeling-thoughts-and-emotions/>

A Mindfulness Practice to Meet Tough Emotions with Curiosity -- <https://www.mindful.org/a-mindfulness-practice-to-meet-tough-emotions-with-curiosity/>

A 12-Minute Meditation to Reconnect With Your Senses -- <https://www.mindful.org/a-12-minute-meditation-to-reconnect-with-your-senses/>