

Have you ever held your breath or ever noticed yourself holding your breath when you were feeling stressed out?

This is a very good question. I would like to approach it by going a little bit into how the body responds to stress. The response to stress is complex and affects many different organs in the body. Research shows when the body senses stress, the brain responds and communicates with the rest of the body through the hypothalamus and the autonomic nervous system.

The lungs are the organs through which we breathe or get oxygen that we distribute to the rest of the body. Epinephrine acting in the lungs leads to faster shallow breathing with the opening of the small airways in the lungs.

This is the part of the physiological response to which the lungs take in more oxygen for distribution to other vital organs into the muscles.

Stress hormones can cause muscles to stiffen and result in not breathing properly.



One way to reverse the rapid shallow breathing that stress creates is to begin deep abdominal breathing. Deep breathing can help with stress and anxiety. The physiological advantage of deep breathing is that you can use it to slow down your breathing and trigger a homeostatic reflex or response from your nervous system that will help you calm down.

Also, mouth-breathing is not ideal. The airways connected to your sinuses are there for a reason. Mouth breathing is a problem because it causes a lack of energy. Getting less oxygen by breathing through the mouth will result in poor sleep quality and lower energy levels overall. The negative effects do not stop in the short term; they can actually be life altering particularly when the habit begins in childhood and goes unchecked. This can easily lead to sleep apnea.

Benefits of nose breathing:

- Breathing through the nose doesn't just help you avoid the effects of mouth breathing, it comes with additional benefits too!
- The nose acts like an air filter, delivering clean air to the lungs and reducing the amount of allergens that get in.
- Nose breathing produces nitric oxide, which helps with oxygen absorption and sterilize the air.
- Nose breathing strengthens the immune system by activating immunoglobulin production.



At Heroes Hope Network we believe that how you begin your day is just as important as to how you end your day. Breathing is an action done automatically that we sometimes take for granted; however if we take a moment in the morning, halfway through the day, and at the end of the day to practice some simple breathing techniques, it will give you more control as to how you respond to the stressors throughout the day. When you OWN your day - you OWN your life.

Follow along below, each technique is simple yet effective.

Practice them daily and as your practice strengthens, you can add more rounds but for the most part, these techniques only take about 10 minutes to complete:

1. Upon Rising breathing technique:

Box Breathing - how to do it:

- Sit comfortably.
- Seal your lips and take a deep breath in, completely filling your lungs. Exhale, and let all the air out.
- Inhale deeply through your nose for the count of five. Hold for the count of five. Exhale for the count of five.
- Empty your lungs completely and hold your breath out for a count of five.
- Repeat for 4 more rounds.

2. Midday breathing technique

Mindset Reset - how to do it:

- Sit up straight in a chair or lie on your back
- Place one hand on your stomach
- Breathe normally through your nose for a while, so that you slow down and relax.
- Now, start a strictly regulated breathing pattern, breathe in for a count of 4-5 seconds into your stomach, feeling it extend outward (as opposed to your chest). Hold for 1 second.

- Followed by a long exhalation, typically 6-7 seconds. It is most important that your exhale is longer than your inhale.
- Repeat for 5 more rounds.

3. Evening breathing technique

4-7-8 breathing - how to do it:

- Empty your lungs completely by letting your lips part and audibly exhaling through your mouth.
- Keep your mouth closed, inhale quietly through your nose while counting to 4.
- Hold your breath for a count of 7.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of 8.
- Repeat the cycle around 6 times before returning to normal breathing.

Experts suggest that breathing exercises become more effective with practice, so persistence is key when incorporating these exercises into your daily routine. Additional tips can help you get the most out of your breath work:

- Prepare for setbacks: it is normal to have setbacks when developing a new habit. Set aside time to practice breathing exercises, and recommit to your goals if you find yourself encountering a roadblock.
- Meditation and yoga are other great ways that allow us to control our breathing, so you may also want to check into these options as well. The key here is focus and concentrated breathing and whatever form you choose to do it, it's up to you.

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

- Andrew Weil, M. D.

- Talk to your doctor: while breathing exercises may calm your nerves and help you sleep, relaxation is not a substitute for talking to your doctor or a specialist. If you're having persistent difficulty with anxiety or a good night's sleep, it's important to contact a healthcare professional for support.

