



Breathing

“When the breath is unsteady, all is unsteady; when the breath is still, all is still. Control the breath carefully. Inhalation gives strength and a controlled body; retention gives steadiness of and and longevity; exhalation purifies the body and spirit.”-Goraksathakam

Increased stress, faster-paced living, and pandemic restrictions are all areas that impact our wellbeing. Many of us, just trying to get through each day, have forgotten how to breathe deeply.

Chest breathing keeps our body in a state of reactivity and stress. These shallow breaths tell the body and mind that we are not safe, impacting our health and wellbeing. The good news? Chest breathing is not our natural state of breathing!

Our natural state of breathing engages the diaphragm, making the stomach rise and fall. By deepening the breath, we can take the body from “Fight or Flight” mode and bring it back to a relaxed state.

Breathe calmness

Before and after each meditation practice, it is beneficial to swoosh water in your mouth. You can use this time to envision the water hydrating your mouth, your gums, and your body as you swallow. Water conducts energy and helps maintain proper bodily functioning.

If you are new to belly breathing, you may wish to practice at home while laying down on your back. Make sure your back is comfortable, bending your knees if required, and using pillows or supports where beneficial. Alternatively, you can practice in a chair or sitting cross-legged on a cushion or the floor.

Personal Breathing Practices

For daily relaxation, grounding and meditation.

1. Once in a comfortable yet stable position, place one hand on your belly and the other hand on your chest.
2. Take a few normal breaths to observe where in your body you are breathing. Are you feeling more movement in your chest or your belly?
3. Work to deepen your breath by softening your belly. Become curious and explore the breath as it enters, trying to bring the breath deep into the belly.
4. Be kind to yourself and patient with your process. Take your time and know that you are working to increase the breath gradually.

If you have trouble bringing the breath into the belly, you may want to use a visualization:

See the air as blue or silver light. Visualize it entering your nose, going down your neck, through your chest and into the belly. As you pause, see the beautiful light pool and swirl in your belly area, picking up any stress or tension you may be holding. Then, as you exhale, visualize the breath travelling back up and pouring out all you gathered from your mouth, smoothly and peacefully taking the stress with it as it leaves.

5. Practice until you feel your body relax and when you are ready, slowly bring yourself back, allowing your breath to continue without conscious attention.

Over time, you will become more aware of your breathing. Catching those moments when your breathing becomes shallow, remind yourself to pause and breathe deeply.

Breath Reflections

What did you notice about your regular breathing as it presented today?

When, and how often, can you schedule breathing to make it a formal practice?

Are there places and times you can informally practice breathing during your daily activities?

Note: If you find that troubling emotion comes up for you as you practice your breathing, write them down and take time to reflect on them. Breathing can be therapeutic, and if anything comes up that you feel you would like support with, please reach out.

“Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor.” -Thich Nhat Hanh