

Trade stress for breath

It seems so simple, but so many of us are not doing it properly. Pay attention to your breath right now – are you breathing deep into your belly? Or shallow into your chest, like so many of us often are?

Many of us have become shallow chest breathers—inhaling through our mouth and taking in less air. This process evolved due to softer food and smaller mouths (chew your (food), and is reinforced due to environmental stressors (temperature, pollution, noise, etc) In addition, expectations, including the desire to have a flat stomach, encourage holding our breath and sucking in our stomachs, which tightens our muscles and makes it much harder to breath into our abdomens.

When we breathe this shallow, the body remains in a self perpetuating state of stress— we signal to our nervous system that we stressed, which in turn contributes to an internal state of stress via constant activation of the SNS.



“The trick to life is to just keep breathing. – Johnny Lung”

Mindful breath meditation is a natural pacemaker that can help recalibrate the nervous system and slows the steady rhythm of the heart. A mindful pause can help align you with the your breath mind, and heart

Scientifically speaking, a breath centered meditation causes the release of the stress reducing hormones serotonin, melatonin and oxytocin. This enables us to better manage this daily anxiety from the unknown, grief, and fear from a place of clarity, versus disparity.

Deep breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, decreasing the heart rate and blood pressure, along with the stress hormone cortisol and its effects in the body.

How to breath

One of my favourite techniques for a breath check in is a few rounds of the 4-7-8 method

- 4 seconds-Inhale
- 7 seconds- hold
- 8 seconds-exhale

POSTURE

- Choose a seated posture; or any position where your hips are above (or at the same) the height of your knees. This helps us stay alert.
- Liftup through the base of your skull to lengthen your spine.
- Close your mouth and relax your jaw. Bring the tip of your tongue softly behind your two top-front teeth, and soften your tongue away from the roof of your mouth.
- Pay attention to your face? Is there tension? Are you clenching between your eyebrows?



FOCUS ON THE EXHALE

- Focus on a long, slow exhale, the inhale takes care of itself.
- The first step is learning to exhale completely. The more you can empty, the more you can receive the in breath and fresh energy.

FEEL IT IN YOUR BODY

- As the inhalation begins, allow your belly, lower back, and pelvic floor to soften enough to receive the inhalation. Expand your rib cage in all directions. Think of the breath animating the torso from the bottom to the top.
- Once your chest (thoracic cavity) has expanded too, pause, retaining the inhalation. Feel the breath filling you up, exchanging old energy for new a fresh energy.
- Begin to exhale slowly through your nose. Let your chest and belly settle back gradually. As the exhalation draws to a close, bring your attention to a subtle toning in your pelvic floor. This should not be forced, it is simply a signal that the exhalation is complete.



PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

- Pranayama and breath control exercises, though seemingly simple, are not always easy. Old patterns are hard to break, mental and physical. Stick with it. I could cite a bunch of studies on the benefits of breath and meditation, but you already know they exist.
- Eventually, this practice trains us to breathe better off the mat.

BREATHE THROUGH IT

- Remember this practice when confronted with a tough moment. When you notice yourself getting elevated, pause before reacting and practice a few rounds of 4-7-8 breathing. There's a yoga sutra (Yoga Sutras of Patanjali) that says, 'To learn how to calm your mind and make peace with a situation, exhale and pause gently'. Exhale. Exhale. Exhale.

Sources

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