

How you breathe has a profound effect on your life and health. It changes how much oxygen enters your body and how much waste leaves it — and it affects cardiac function, immune function, mood, stress levels, hormone levels, digestion, strength, and endurance. The most efficient way to breathe is diaphragmatic breathing, or belly breathing. It's how healthy infants breathe; as we get older we shift to our chest and shoulder muscles and use less of the diaphragm. These exercises help you relearn the most healthful way of breathing. Any of them counts as your physical modality for the day.

Belly Breathing

Practiced regularly, it becomes second nature — a natural way to reduce stress and improve circulation

- Pick a comfortable position: sitting, standing, or lying on your back. It may help to practice in front of a mirror the first few times.
- If standing or sitting, keep your feet flat on the floor and your back straight.
- Place your hands at your side, in your lap, or on your belly.
- Take 3 deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth, feeling stress exit your body with each exhalation.
- As you inhale, let the breath completely fill your lungs and push your belly out. (As your diaphragm contracts, it presses down on your abdominal organs and pushes the belly out.)
- Exhale completely, feeling your belly move back in as the breath leaves.
- Do a series of 7 breaths. Rest for 2 minutes, then repeat 2 more times.

Alternating Nostril Breathing

Especially good for chronic sinusitis, allergies, and lung infections

- Sit comfortably in a chair or on the floor. Press your left thumb against the left side of your nose, blocking the air passage. Keep your other fingers straight, not touching your face.
- Breathe in through your right nostril for a count of ten.
- Move your hand so the side of your index finger closes the right side of your nose.
- Breathe out of the left nostril for a count of ten.
- Repeat five times.
- Switch hands. Breathe in through the left nostril and out through the right for a count of ten.
- Repeat five times.

Breathing Colors

Meditation plus breathing — helpful for relaxation, stress, high blood pressure, immune stimulation, and insomnia

- With your feet parallel, shoulder-width apart, slowly bend and unbend your knees.
- Each time you bend your knees to go down, breathe out. Each time you straighten to come up, breathe in.
- Bend your knees as far as you can without your heels leaving the ground. Keep your back straight; don't bend forward at the hips.

Now add the colors through visualization:

- As you breathe in, breathe in colors from the earth and the air through your feet and hands.
- Breathe in each color several times, beginning with red, then the rest of the rainbow: orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet, and white.
- As you breathe out, let the colors go back into your environment.

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