



# AcuBalance

Acupuncture & Integrative Medicine



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## **Breathing for Relaxation**

Breath is essential for life – we inhale to receive nourishing oxygen and exhale to release the waste product, carbon dioxide; but did you know that certain types breathing could impact your health? Poor breathing habits can diminish the flow of oxygen and carbon dioxide in and out of your body, which makes it harder to cope with stress. In fact, improper breathing can contribute to anxiety, panic attacks, depression, muscular tension/aches, headaches, chronic fatigue, and indigestion – just to name a few.

## **The Physiology of Breathing**

When you inhale, oxygen is brought in through the nose, where it's warmed, humidified, and cleansed by your body; this is facilitated by the diaphragm, which expands and contracts to receive and release breath. Once oxygen is inhaled, it travels down the lung's bronchial tubes, which are like the branches of a tree. Eventually, oxygen makes its way down to the bottom of the lungs to balloon-like sacs called alveoli. Alveoli are covered in small blood vessels, which absorb the oxygen and send it to the heart via the pulmonary veins. Then, oxygen rich blood is pumped into the aorta, sending oxygenated blood to nourish our body's cells via various arteries. In turn, our veins bring carbon dioxide rich blood back to the heart, where it is pumped into the pulmonary artery to make its way back to the lungs for exhalation.

## **2 Ways of Breathing**

There are 2 primary breath patterns (1) chest/thoracic (2) abdominal/diaphragmatic. Let's figure out which one is your "go to": *Take a deep breath*. What expanded first, your chest or your stomach? Many people breathe with their chest, because they associate it with their lungs. However, chest breathing is shallow and irregular so less oxygen makes it all the way down to the alveoli. This leads to poorly oxygenated blood and a poorly nourished body, which pushes the body into the stress response. Abdominal breathing is actually the natural healthy way to breathe (think about how babies look when they breathe); it allows for maximum diaphragm movement, optimal oxygenation of blood, and a nourished and relaxed body.

## **Moving into Abdominal/Diaphragmatic Breathing**

1. Close your eyes. Put your right hand on your abdomen and your left hand on your chest.
2. Without trying to change anything, notice how you're breathing, with your chest or tummy?
3. If you're breathing from your chest, try to switch to abdominal breathing; the easiest way to do this is to make a full exhalation to push out all the air from your lungs. When you inhale, imagine the breath filling your tummy – allowing it to balloon out.
4. Take a moment to do a small handful of deep belly inhalations – once you get the hang of it, see if you can resume your normal breathing patterns while still using your tummy to draw the air in.

5. On a day-to-day basis, check in with your breathing and take a moment and switch to your tummy. Eventually, your body will reprogram so abdominal breathing will become natural.

***Now comes the time to breathe for relaxation...you can use any of these exercises alone, or in combination...but start with these first 3 steps.***

1. Lie down on your back with your legs straight and slightly apart; arms at your side and palms up; eyes closed – if another position is more comfortable or practical then go for it – be your own guide.
2. Bring your awareness to your breath, and place your hand on your stomach, slightly above your belly button and feel the rise and fall of your belly.
3. Breathe in through your nose, and out through your mouth. Nose inhalations are smoother and more controlled, and therefore more desirable for healthy breathing. However, if you're congested or feel more relaxed with mouth breathing – again – let your body be your guide!

***Breathe Counting:*** Start to count your breathing in this cycle, and repeat as desired

1. Breathe in for 5 seconds
2. Hold for 5 seconds
3. Breathe out for 7 seconds
4. Hold for 5 seconds

***Breathing with a Mantra & Visualization***

1. Use each inhalation is a moment to become mindful of any tension in your body, scan your body for places you are holding tension or stress. Take a breath in and scan the head and neck, breathe out tension. Then move down to the shoulders, breathing in to notice any tension, and breathing out that tension, then down to the chest, then the abdomen, then the arms & hands, then the hips, then the legs, and finishing with the feet. Breathe in awareness, breathe out tension.
2. You can also use breathwork to repeat an affirmation of mantra such as
  - a. I breathe in peace, I breathe out tension (or any other words that come to your mind)
  - b. I am safe, I am at peace, I am balanced...see our "affirmations" hand out for inspiration.

***Breathing for Calming the Solar Plexus and Nourishment***

1. Place your hands on your solar plexus and breathe naturally for a few breaths
2. When you inhale, imagine light energy pouring in to your lungs and trickling down to your solar plexus.
3. When you exhale, imagine this energy being distributed all over your body, nourishing and healing every cell. Repeat as desired.

***Alternative Breathing:*** Many people with sinus or tension headaches will find this useful

1. Rest the index and middle finger of your right hand on your forehead, between your eyebrows
2. Close the right nostril with your thumb
3. Inhale deeply with your left nostril
4. Close your left nostril with your ring finger and open your right nostril
5. Exhale slowly through your right nostril
6. Inhale through the right nostril
7. Close your right nostril with your thumb and open your left nostril
8. Exhale with your left nostril

9. Inhale through the left nostril and begin the next cycle, and repeat for 5-25 cycles.

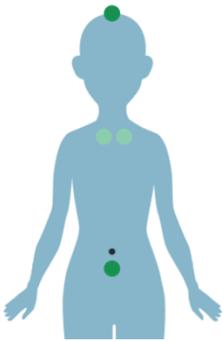
**Vital Breath:** This is a great exercise when you're feeling fatigued upon waking, or when you have that midday "crash"

#### PART 1

1. Place your index and middle finger of your right hand about 1 ½" below your belly button
2. Place your index and middle finger of your left hand on the crown of your head
3. Do 3 sets of breath counting (breathe in for 5, hold for 5, breathe out for 7, hold for 5)

#### PART 2

4. Place the index and middle finger of both hands on the soft fleshy area just below the medial border of your collar bone, in the first rib space.
5. Tap or apply light pressure on those points and do 3 sets of deep abdominal breathing (breathe in for 5, breathe out for 7 with no breath holding)



Once you're ready to start moving about your day again, take a deep breath in, and let out a sigh – a sound of deep relief as the air rushes out of your body.