

“For breath is life, and if you breathe well you will live long on earth.”

— Sanskrit Proverb

Breath is vital. When we are stressed, happy, or exercising, breath causes a feedback loop for that physical state. However, breathing can be either voluntary or involuntary—which means that we can affect our physical state. Being conscious and breathing in a particular way can lead to deep relaxation, decreased pain, and improved mental state.

Abdominal breathing, also called diaphragmatic breathing, changes the oxygenation levels in your body as well as strengthening the diaphragm. Many people feel calmer and more centered afterwards, and it may help to reduce negative emotions. Since it can be practiced anytime, anywhere, for free, and has been associated with a host of positive physical effects, why not try it today?

Get Started

- Sit or lie down comfortably, with your feet flat on the floor. Put one hand on your upper chest, and the other on your abdomen, just under your ribcage. Feel yourself breathing and become aware of how deeply or shallowly you are breathing
- Take a deep breath, feeling your abdomen rise as you breathe. Your upper hand should move very little, while your abdomen lifts your other hand. Imagine a feeling of warmth as the breath moves from your mouth, down your throat, into your lungs, and your diaphragm expands.
- Hold the breath for a count of four.
- Exhale slowly through your nose for a count of four.
- Inhale slowly to a count of four, feeling the warmth of your breath and your abdomen rising. Try to keep your chest relatively still. Hold the breath for four, then exhale slowly, and repeat.



Reflect

- Consider how your body feels different from before practicing conscious breathing. Are your shoulders more relaxed? Do your thoughts feel any different?

Repeat

- Five minutes is a good amount of time to affect your physiology, decrease anxiety, and improve mental state. However, even one or two abdominal breaths can be helpful! Although best learned sitting or lying down, any time you can consciously breathe is an opportunity, including standing in line at the grocery store.

As you become proficient in abdominal breathing, you may want to tense your abdomen slightly at the end of the exhale, to push out the remaining air. If lying down, you can also try putting a book on your abdomen and lifting it with your breath.

Over time, you may not need to involve your hands. Some people use visualizations, for instance, a half circle that represents in the inhale and hold, and a semicircle finishing the loop for the exhale and hold. Other people repeat a word as a mantra, like peace or joy, letting that word center their thoughts.

Practice whenever you can. Because of how abdominal breathing affects your mental state, it may be especially useful when you are stressed out, tired, frustrated, or confused. Abdominal breathing can help you to relax, reset, and refocus.