

Breathe Yourself Better!

Techniques to help you breathe your way to better physical, mental and emotional health!

Slow down your breathing

Most people breath 12-18 times a minute. A study found **that slowing down your breathing by half can reduce feelings of pain**. It's thought that deep, slow breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, shuts off the stress response and helps the body relax tensions around the painful area. To breathe at a rate of 6 breaths a minute, take a deep breath into your belly for 4 seconds and exhale for 6.

The 4-7-8... to fall asleep

If you're struggling to fall asleep, Dr Andrew Weil from the University of Arizona **says the "4-7-8" technique is a 'natural tranquilliser for the nervous system'**. Keep the tip of your tongue on the ridge of tissue just above your upper front teeth and exhale forcefully through your mouth making a "whoosh" sound. Then close your mouth and inhale through the nose for a count of 4. Hold your breath for a count of 7, then exhale through your mouth (making the whoosh sound) for a count of 8, repeat the cycle no more than 4 times and you should be ready to drift off.

The puffer fish (to stave off a panic attack)

If you feel anxious and have that "fight or flight" feeling, breathe in slowly through your nose, directing your breath into your belly. Then blow out your cheeks like a puffer fish, hold for 5 seconds, then slowly exhale through the mouth. **Breathing out through pursed lips helps slow down your breathing and helps stop hyperventilation.**

The "HA" breath, to ease tension headache

Breathing too shallowly can result in an inadequate supply of oxygen to blood vessels in the brain resulting in a headache. This technique not only supplies a good amount of oxygen to the body but also helps release jaw, face and neck tension. First slowly and deeply inhale through your nose. Then exhale strongly through the mouth making a "ha" sound opening your mouth wide and sticking your tongue out as far as possible towards your chin. Inhale slowly returning to a neutral face, repeat 4-6 times.

The "double calm" breath to de-stress

Exhaling for longer than you inhale activates the parasympathetic response by stimulating the vagus nerve, **which slows down your heart rate and lowers blood pressure**. Inhale for a count of 4 through your nose and exhale through pursed lips for a count of 8. Then inhale for a count of 5 and exhale for a count of 10, inhale for a count of 6 and exhale for a count of 12. Keep going for a couple of minutes any time you need to quickly de-stress.

Deeper breathing for better general health and to ease heartburn

Deeper, belly breathing (or diaphragmatic breathing) gets more oxygen into our brains, our vital organs and we can boost our immune systems and feel more energised! Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly. Breathe in deeply and slowly to a count of 4 or 5, directing air into your tummy rather than your chest so that the hand on your belly rises and the hand on your chest stays relatively still. Breathe out for a count of 7 or 8. Continue breathing like this for as long as is comfortable. A clinical trial published in the American Journal of Gastroenterology also found that **people with acid reflux who regularly practiced belly breathing (or diaphragmatic breathing) had less heartburn**. This is because this exercise helps strengthen the muscles of the diaphragm which in turn helps prevent the muscle at the bottom of the oesophagus from opening and allowing stomach acid leak back up into the chest and throat.

The techniques above have been taken from advice by Stuart Sandeman, Transformational Breath Coach and founder of 'Breathpod', published in an article in the health section of the Daily Express, Tuesday 15th January 2019.