

Catch Your Breath:

Essential Breathing Techniques



Breathing is the link between our body and our mind. It is the root of mindfulness. Many praise mindful breathing for its effectiveness in stress reduction and relaxation. It is common to feel more relaxed after practicing mindful breathing, but the primary purpose is not relaxation, rather, the emphasis is on being present. Deep breathing can help calm the nervous system, reducing feelings of stress and anxiety—especially before exercise.

In-and-Out Breath

Mindful breathing begins with a simple awareness of the breath.

1. Sit up comfortably in a chair or on the floor with your back straight and your hands in your lap or on your knees.*
2. Bring your attention to your breathing. Do not try and control your breath. Just notice it. We do this by keeping our mouth closed and our eyes shut. If this feels uncomfortable, half-open your mouth and eyes, bringing your visual focus to a point a meter or so directly in front of you, for instance, to a spot on the floor.
3. When you breathe in, you know that this is your in-breath. When you breathe out, you are mindful that this is your out-breath.
4. As you breathe in, say to yourself (in your head), “Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in.”
5. And as you breathe out, say to yourself (in your head), “Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out.”
6. You do not even need to recite the whole sentence; you can use just two words: “In” and “Out.”
7. This technique can help you keep your mind on your breath. If your mind wanders, just come back to experiencing the physical sensations of the breath and begin again. Keep following the breath for at least five minutes.

A variation of this exercise is to label the out-breath with words such as stress, tension, and negativity and the in-breath with words such as calm, peace, positivity, etc.

**This exercise can also be completed while lying down, with one hand resting on the stomach and one on the upper chest.*

Alternate Nostril Breath

Consciously alternating your breath between the nostrils will allow you to activate and access your whole brain.

This exercise is known to calm and center the mind, improve sleep, and ease anxiety and stress. Your nose is directly linked to your brain and nervous system. Breathing in through your left nostril will access the right “feeling” hemisphere of your brain, and breathing in through your right nostril, will access the left “thinking” hemisphere of your brain.

1. Come to a comfortable seated position. Close your eyes or if you'd prefer, focus on a spot on the floor just in front of you. Bring your mind to your breath. Do not try and control your breath. Just notice it.
2. Use your right thumb to close off your right nostril.
3. Inhale slowly through your left nostril.
4. Pause for a second.
5. Now close your left nostril with your ring finger and release your thumb off your right nostril.
6. Exhale through your right nostril.
7. Now, inhale through your right nostril.
8. Pause.
9. Use thumb to close off your right nostril.
10. Breathe out through your left nostril.
11. After every exhalation, remember to breathe in from the same nostril from which you exhaled. Keep your eyes closed throughout and continue taking long, deep, smooth breaths without any force or effort.
12. This is one round. Start slowly with 1 or 2 rounds and gradually increase. Sit quietly for a few moments after you have finished.