

Certified Classical Homeopath

Breathing Exercises for Relaxation

Breath control is important for any healing. Breath control exercises help immensely. In my practice there is a substantial difference in success rates between clients who do these breathing exercises daily and those who do not. These exercises are simple to learn and easy to do.

Breath control and breathing exercises are taught in many healing methodologies. The exercises included here are drawn from Yoga, Ayurveda, Chinese medicine, and other energetic approaches to health and wellness. The goal of these exercises is to bring balance to the voluntary and automatic portions of your nervous system - this directly affects your endocrine and hormonal systems. If you would like more guidance, you will find Andrew Weil's, *Breathing: The Master Key to Self Healing/Meditation for Optimum Health* available as a book or CD from http://myranissen.com/resources_books.html.

What Breathing Exercises Help.

Breathing exercises can facilitate healing for a number of situations anywhere from anxiety, anger, frustration, stress, sadness, impulsive behaviors, over eating, smoking, insomnia, infertility, and more.

How and When to do Exercises

Do these 4 exercises twice daily. If you can fit them in more often through the day, that is very beneficial, but a minimum of twice daily is necessary. These exercises take just a few minutes. They do not have to be done altogether or in any particular order.

What to Do

1. Watch your breathing

For a minute or so, just be aware of your breathing. Notice the feel of the air as it passes into and through you, or notice your ribcage expanding, or any other aspect of breathing that occurs to you. Just pay attention to it without trying to modify it. In actuality, I am never able to watch myself breathe without affecting it, but try to just watch. Try to develop a habit of doing this whenever you are waiting for something. Pay attention to your breathing when you are at a stoplight, waiting in line at the grocery store, waiting for an appointment.

2. Exhale heavily

For the space of 10 breaths, put your emphasis on the exhalation. This half of the breathing cycle is one that we usually do not pay much attention to, but in this exercise, focus on it. Exhalation is the decision maker in how much air can be pulled into the lungs on the next breath. Many people exchange less than half of the possible air volume in their lungs on any given breath. A full exhalation is important to allow a full exchange of air. For each breath, breathe out as completely as possible - then breathe out just a little more! As you breathe in again, allow your abdomen to expand. Many of us were taught at some point to keep our breathing up in our chest, but a natural breath will expand the belly. For this exercise, fully exhale and then breathe in again for 10 breaths. Make the exhalation the important part of the breath cycle.

3. Share the Air

For another 10 - 12 breaths, imagine your self as a balloon that is being inflated and

deflated. As you take each breath, try to perceive it as air being blown into you by the atmosphere around you. As you exhale, imagine the air being pulled out of you as your surroundings breathe in. For some people it is helpful to imagine the atmosphere around them as all of humanity, or Gaia or the Cosmos or a divine being. While you are doing this, try to feel the connection between yourself and your surroundings. We all share the air. Count the breaths you are sharing.

4. Yoga Restorative Breath

For this exercise, you will do a cycle of 4 breaths. You can do 2 cycles (8 breaths) if you choose, but do not do more than that at once. This breathing technique can alter your mental state substantially, so it is very important to observe this limitation.

First, stand, sit or lay so that your spine is straight. Next, place the tip of your tongue behind and just above the top of your upper front teeth. Allow the rest of your tongue to lay in your mouth as usual. With your mouth closed, breathe in through your nose to a count of 4. I use 4 heartbeats, but you can count any regular sequence that feels comfortable and matches the speed of your breathing - though remember that slower and deeper are good goals. Then hold your breath to a count of 7 at the same pace. Finally breathe out slowly and completely to a count of 8. As you breathe out, you will open your mouth, but leave your tongue where you have been holding it, so you will exhale around it.

Some Suggestions When to do the Exercises

Laying in bed after you wake up, standing in the shower, walking around the block, sitting in your car at a stop light, waiting in line at a store, sitting at your desk, just before or after eating. Take time now to choose 2 specific times each day when you can reliably do these exercises. Each weekend, look back over the week and see if you successfully remembered to do them. If not, choose different times for the upcoming week. In follow-up consultations, I will ask when you are doing the breathing exercises and what you experience when you do them.

At its best, breathing should be slow, deep, and regular. Your goal should be to make your own breath slower, deeper, and more regular. You will find as you become more aware of your breath that it is connected with your mental and emotional states and that you can alter these with your breathing.

In order to keep track of the 4 breaths in the cycle, I usually start with my hands with fingers folded in. As I take in each breath, I extend one finger. When all 4 fingers of one hand are out, I am done with that cycle. If I am doing a second cycle, I extend fingers of the other hand.

Check Your Response

As you do the exercises, and especially as you finish them, pay attention to how you are feeling in body and mind. When you finish, take a moment to check over your body - see if anything is uncomfortable or in need of attention - perhaps shoulders are tight and need to be stretched. Also, pay attention to how you feel - Calm? Weary? Excited? Notice if anything feels different than it did before you started the breathing exercise.

Breathing exercises help balance the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems that control many of the processes in your body. When you take the time to do these exercises it enhances and unifies your focus. This is important to experience stress relief.