



## Breathing Exercises for Stress

DISCOVER FIVE DEEP BREATHING EXERCISES TO HELP YOU MANAGE STRESS AND CREATE MORE CALM IN YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE

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Using deep breathing techniques is a great way to reduce stress or anxiety.

By focusing on your breath, you can take a break from the chatter of your mind and bring yourself into the present moment.

When you focus on taking deeper breaths, you also help to soothe your body during times of stress by kick-starting our body's 'rest and digest' system and reducing the effects of the fight or flight response.

Before beginning the breathing exercises, you may like to follow the guide below to set yourself up comfortably.

1. Find a position where your spine is gently elongated (but not strained), perhaps sitting in a chair or cross-legged on the floor. Make any last adjustments, such as rolling your shoulders or turning your head from side to side, so you can comfortably ease yourself into stillness.
2. When you feel ready, you may like to close your eyes. Otherwise, maintain a soft focus on a point not too far away in front of you (this is a great option if you think you might fall asleep!).
3. Start to invite your attention into the present moment, letting other thoughts or distractions softly fall away.
4. You may notice your mind wandering during breathing exercises, and that's ok! Just bring your focus back to your breath as soon as you can. You may have to bring your attention back once, twice, 10 or 20 times – just keep practising and it will start feeling more natural in time.

### BREATHING EXERCISES

Here are the breathing techniques I follow to help me manage stress.

Everybody is different, so try each one to find out what works for you.

#### The Point of Stillness

Start to notice the journey of each breath, moving in and out of your body. See if you can follow this journey for a little while.

When it feels right, begin to focus on the pause at the end of each exhale (before the next inhale begins).

There's no need to alter the length of this pause – it may be very short, or it may be a little longer. This pause is also called The Point of Stillness, a small space of quiet and rest which we can learn to appreciate.

#### Deep Breathing

Place one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. Simply feel the movements as each breath inflates and deflates.

You may like to deepen your breaths to maximise the oxygen intake and help facilitate the parasympathetic nervous system (your body's 'rest and digest' mechanism that counteracts the fight or flight response).

This is a particularly powerful breathing exercise to reduce stress.

#### Oceanic Breathing

The aim of this breathing exercise is to create an ocean sound in the back of your throat.

Gently place your tongue on the roof of your mouth to slightly narrow your throat, but be careful not to tense up too much! You should still feel comfortable and relaxed.

Begin to take deeper breaths and notice the ocean sound being created by your breathing.

## Elliptical Breathing

This breathing exercise involves two different steps.

The first is to picture a circular shape in your mind and as you exhale, visualise your breath moving down one side of the circle. As you inhale, imagine your breath moving up the other side of the circle.

Once this feels comfortable, begin incorporating the second step by smoothing out your breath so there aren't any noticeable pauses in the breath cycle; as soon as one breath finishes, the next one begins.

If the second step doesn't feel right for you, return to step one by simply visualising your breath moving around the circular shape.

## The Breathing Waltz

Breathing to relax doesn't always need to be serious – why not try this fun breathing exercise in a moment of need?

Simply breathe in for three seconds, hold for three and breathe out for three. If it helps, you might also like to visualise a waltzing movement in your mind. If this is too much, just focus on counting and finding a pace that works

well for you; not too fast and not too slow.

You should notice a deepening and lengthening of your breathing pattern, but not too much that it leaves you feeling out of breath.

## How to end the breathing technique

Let your attention move away from your breath by starting to notice the world around you.

Listen to sounds, notice your sense of smell and taste, and feel sensations in your body (such as areas of tension or relaxation, or the texture of materials against your skin).

When you're ready, open your eyes and reconnect with your sense of sight.

While it's great to take the time to make breathing exercises part of your regular routine, I like to use specific ones during stressful situations.

For example, I would use the Deep Breathing technique before a public speaking presentation and the Elliptical Breathing technique if I wake up during the night with a racing mind.

