

Breathing Yoga

When breath departs, so too does life. Therefore, regulate the breath.

- Hatha Yoga Pradipika – Ch.2:S.3

What is Yoga Breathing?

Consciously exhale long and thin through your nose. Feel it on your upper lip. Then inhale slowly through the center of both nostrils. Pause. Doesn't it feel good? ... Try it again. If your exhale was shallow, try an "ahhh" breath exhaling the sound "ahh" to explore the length of your exhale. Then do it several times through your nose again. Notice how you feel ... *Atha Yoganushasanam* (1-1). And now the yoga begins, and you, my friends are practicing the yoga, simply by observing and experiencing your breath.

So, why breathe like this? Very simple, mindful or conscious breath reinstates the precious moment. This type of breathing is timeless because the practice demands your attention to this moment, the "Now". Yoga philosophy claims we are allotted a certain number of breaths per lifetime. How we choose to illustrate that then becomes our practice of longevity. Here in the west, we have discovered that stress is related to diseases and that long deep breathing reduces stress. After all, breathing is the first thing we do when we are born and the last thing we do when we die. Practice observing your breath as often as possible.

Why Breath?

Strengthens your respiratory and immune systems.

Reduces stress.

Energizes greater alertness to your body and brain.

Promotes healing on emotional, physical and psychological levels.

Reels you into the present precious moment.

Supports clear, truthful thinking and actions.

Aides you during transitional times.

Trains the brain how to let go over and over during each mindful exhale.

How to Sit When Breathing

Sit is a way that you're comfortable with a straight spine. Set yourself up in way that you could remain still and comfortable for a few minutes. If you are in a chair, it is best to take off your shoes and rest the soles of your feet flat on the floor. Place equal weight in both of your sit bones as you lengthen you spine away from your seat. Continue to elongate your spine without causing additional tension or stress. Lengthening both sides of your neck so that your ears are over your shoulders and you chin is level to the floor, melting your shoulder blades down your back and away from your spine. Begin to lift your navel away from your pubis plate; redistributing the weight equally in both of your sits bones. Continue to lengthen your breast bone from your navel, broadening across your collar bones. Softening your throat and your face muscles. The crown of your head is reaching away from the base of your spine. Be still, soft and open.

Following the Breath By Thich Nhat Hanh

Breathing in, I calm my body.

Breathing out, I smile.

Dwelling in the present moment,

I know this is a wonderful moment!

Breathing in, I know I'm breathing in.

Breathing out, I know

as the in-breath grows deep,

the out-breath grows slow.

Breathing in makes me calm.

Breathing out brings me ease.

With the in-breath, I smile.

With the out breath, I release.

Breathing in, there is only the present moment.

Breathing out, it is a wonderful moment.

To learn more about Thich Nhat Hanh please visit www.plumvillage.org

Observing the Breath

Still sitting with a straight spine, gazing softly at these words. Rest your hands on your thighs or your fore arms on your arm rests so that your shoulders ease away from your ears. Lift your torso away from your seat, the crown of your head away from your tail bone. Continue breathing through the center of both nostrils. Notice the subtle movements inside your body caused by your breath. Experience the individuality of each unique inhale and each unique exhale. Allow your breath to show you where you are open and relaxed and where you are closed and in tension. It will vary and change as you practice this exercise. Be still, breathe and observe. Listen to the rhythm of your inhales and exhales and how they blend in to the universes rhythms. Let that rhythm be soothing poetry to your heart and to others around you. After all the breath is our life force.

The Three Breath Practice: By Jillian Pransky

You can practice Three Deep Conscious Breaths anywhere, anytime and as often as you wish. However, when you are just starting out, it can be helpful to follow these few simple steps to enhance the effectiveness of your practice. For more seasoned yoga practitioners, please skip down and begin at #4:

1. Please stop whatever activity you are involved in so you can give your full attention to the breath. Over time you will be able to consciously breathe in any moment - while you are walking, talking, listening, working, waiting, or even eating, however, in the beginning, it's good to stop what you're doing so you can concentrate more easily.
2. You can sit in chair or on the ground with your back relaxed, but straight or stand with your weight distributed evenly on each foot.

3. When you are new to the practice, and if you are in a safe environment, you may close your eyes so your attention is on the breath and not on outside activities and scenery. However, eventually, you actually want to do this practice with your eyes open, aware of your environment. This way, you learn to connect to your breath as you are moving regularly from moment to moment, engaged in the world around you.

4. Relax and take a deep, slowly breathing through your nose, then breathe out again through your nose. Allow your mind to follow your breath in and back out of your body. You can focus on the tip of the nose where the breath enters and leaves or you can mentally follow the breath on its complete path in to and back out of the body.

5. After you have completely exhaled, allow another natural breath to flow in. Don't pull or suck the breath in, it will come to you naturally. Once you have a full breath in, exhale again without forcing or pushing the breath out. Allow all of the breath to empty from your lungs without jumping ahead to the next inhale. Simply rest your mind on the breath and feel its affects; observing and sensing. Stay relaxed and allow your awareness of the breath to be soft, not heavy with concentration.

6. Each inhalation and exhalation is one cycle. Do three cycles and allow your mind to rest fully on the breath. You may notice that your mind wanders even after the first breath. When you notice that the mind has tripped out to your to-do-list, dissecting a past conversation, or balancing your check book, just acknowledge that you've been distracted and gently guide your mind back to your breath. The attitude in which you guide yourself back to the breath is KEY. So when you find yourself tripping out, just be humored, and with the warmth you'd offer your best friend, guide your mind back to the flow of your next breath. (We tend to go where we feel welcomed, to relax and expand more when we are not bullied.)

7. After getting the hang of paying attention to Three Conscious Breaths bring the practice into your everyday life as often as you can. You skip parts 1-3 and jump right to 4-6. Use this Three Breath Pause throughout your day in any moment, when you are walking to your office, eating lunch, in a conversation with a friend, working on your computer, waiting on a line, stuck in traffic, whenever. You will find this practice transforming your day. And, eventually, you will find the "Pause" more accessible to you in those harder moments, like when you've just been insulted, or your child or parent is pushing your buttons, or anytime you feel your anger or irritation building.

Counting the Breath

Continue anchoring your feet into the floor and sitting very tall. Relax your face muscle more. Let your jaw tension soften and your tongue rest in the lower palate of your mouth. Breathe naturally through the center of both nostrils. Notice the sensation of your exhale against your upper lip.

Now, can you make the length of your exhale equal to the length of your inhale without creating more tension around your breath, in your face or the action of breathing itself? Begin with a five count exhale and a five count inhale (5:5). If that creates more tension in your body or breath, reduce your count to (4:4). The more you practice this exercise over the years, the more peacefully profound your experience becomes. Eventually, increase your count in small increments working towards (12:12). Be patient and practice often (you can keep count of each round with your fingers).

Breathing with Shoulder Rolls

Please sit with your spine straight and the soles of your feet resting on the floor. Breathe naturally through the center of both nostrils as you relax your gaze on these words and explore the relationship of your breath and how you carry your shoulders. Perhaps now is a good time to soften some of the tension which gathers across your shoulders, the burdens of the world.

Press your shoulders forward and down. Pause. Inhale your shoulders forward and up. Pause. Hold the breath in as you press your shoulders up and back. Pause. Exhale the breath slowly as you slide the shoulders down the back. Pause. Hold the breath out as you press the shoulders forward and down. Pause. Inhale slowly as you lift the shoulders forward and up. Pause. Hold the breath in as you press your shoulders up and back. Pause. Exhale the breath slowly as you slide the shoulders down the back. Pause. Hold the breath out as you and bring your shoulders forward and down. Pause. Begin again slowing it down on the inhale and exhale three more times.

Not sure where to go next? Click on any of the drop down menus above for our selection of yoga practices or the specific list of *Asanas* (exercises) found in the left column. Let's continue ... inhale slowly through the center of both nostrils, exhale completely feeling it on your upper lip. Please turn your attention inward and listen to what your body needs.