
Take a breather with these 5 stress-busting exercises

Everyone could use another tool in the toolbox when it comes to handling stress, so here's one that you can use right now: your breath. It's easy to incorporate these exercises between physical therapy patients, or even to use alongside them when they need a little relaxation during a session. So breathe in, breathe out, and get ready for a fresh start on your day.

“Controlled nasal and diaphragmatic breathing can have a calming effect on your body,” says Omi Iwasaki, senior vice president of performance at Exos. “It can lower blood pressure, slow breath rate, cool the body, reduce anxiety, lower heart rate, promote relaxation, and help to balance your nervous system.”

Optimizing your breathing doesn't have to be hard, and there are many ways to customize it to your needs. Not every breathing method or cadence has the same effect on everyone, so take note of how different exercises make you feel, and incorporate them into your day as appropriate.

So, the next time you're feeling stress or anxiety, try one of these breathing techniques to find your center. Most people feel improvements in as little as 4 to 6 breath cycles.

Resonance breathing

Six breaths. One minute. That's it when it comes to resonance breathing. For thousands of years, Buddhist monk and yogi practices have incorporated this tried-and-true approach.

True resonance is inhaling for six seconds and exhaling for six seconds. But if this is too hard, try inhaling for four seconds and exhaling for six seconds, or five seconds for both. And work up to the six-second mark. The main thing is to simply focus on exhaling longer than your inhale.

“Bee breath” or bhramari from pranayama yoga

For this technique, find a comfortable position and close your eyes and mouth and relax your lips, jaw, and base of your tongue. Then take a slow, controlled breath through your nose. Exhale through your nose while making a humming sound. You can even try humming higher or lower pitches to see how that changes the effect. Repeat six or seven times and take note of how you feel.

Box breathing

Popular with the U.S. Navy SEALs, box breathing is a great way to help with powerful stress relief. Plus, it's one of the easiest tempos to remember; just think of a box with four sides.

Start with a slow inhale through your nose for four seconds. Hold your breath for four seconds. Exhale slowly through your nose or mouth for four seconds. Then hold your breath for four seconds before inhaling and starting the pattern over again. Do this four times to start feeling the effect. If four seconds is too much, try starting with three seconds for each.

4 - 7 - 8 breath

This relaxation breathing tempo was created by Dr. Andrew Weil as a tool for relaxation and stress relief. Some say it helps reduce anxiety or help them fall asleep.

Rest the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth, directly behind your upper front teeth. Release any tension from your body by pushing the air through your lips, so it makes a whooshing sound. Inhale through your nose for four seconds with your mouth closed. Hold your breath for seven seconds. Exhale through your mouth for eight seconds. Start by repeating this four times and eventually work up to eight repetitions.

6 - 4 - 10 breath

This breathing tempo is one that Exos coaches have recommended to our clients for years to ease stress, help you fall asleep, and improve cardio health.

Before you begin, pause and notice your breath. This way you can compare your current breathing to how you feel after this practice. Then inhale for six seconds, hold for four seconds, and exhale for 10 seconds. Work on making that exhale nice and long.

Disclaimer: If your breathing rate is 20 times per minute or higher, consult a physician. People who have low blood pressure or are on medication to lower it, people with diabetes, and pregnant women need to exercise caution with breathing exercises. Slow, deep breathing exercises are not recommended for people with very low blood pressure or for anyone prone to fainting.