

Breathing Techniques for Relaxation

The pattern of breath directly affects the mind. Therefore, when the breath is controlled, the mind is controlled. One of the eight facets of yoga is Pranayama or the science of breath control. Think of the breath as the bridge between the mind and body. The power of the intentional breath can bring us down the desired road to relaxation.

These simple breathing techniques encourage relaxation. They can be used any time during the day when you notice yourself becoming tense; they also help to promote sleep. It is very important that the heart rate does not increase during Pranayama. If it does, please return to your normal, natural breathing pattern.

Mindful Breathing

Lie down or sit in a restful position with the back straight. Allow yourself to settle in and relax. First witness the natural breath. Notice where the body moves with the breath. If you are comfortable, breathe through the nose; or you may start by inhaling through the nose and exhaling out the mouth. Slowly begin to increase the inhalation. Lengthen the exhalation to match. If at any time you feel light headed or short of breath, return to your normal breathing. When you have found a steady rhythm, allow the mind to stay focused on the rise and fall of the breath and begin with Abdominal Breathing – Position 1.

Abdominal Breathing – Position 1

Place your hands on the lower belly with the tips of the index fingers lightly touching over the naval. Breathe with the diaphragm so that the belly rises into your hands like a balloon, separating the index fingers on the inhalation. Allow the breath to fill the side and back belly region so that there is a full expansion in all directions. As you exhale, gently pull the naval toward the spine so that the index fingers come back together. Then release the gentle pull of the naval and allow the abdomen to float back up for the next inhale, as if it is an answer to the exhalation. Practice this breath until you feel comfortable with it. You may notice that you feel calmer and more relaxed. Then you can move on to the Diaphragmatic Breathing – Position 2.



Diaphragmatic Breathing (Dirga Pranayama)

Begin with the Abdominal Breathing technique and take 6 expansive breaths to the abdomen.

Position 2

Next move the hands to the sides of the lower rib cages with fingers pointing toward each other. Lightly press the heels of the hands into the ribs. As you inhale, first to lift the belly, then consciously expand the sides of the rib cages with the breath. Notice how the ribs expand slightly outward and upward into the hands on the inhalation. Allow the ribs to soften inward and down on the exhalation. Continue breathing to the belly and ribs for 6 more breaths.

Position 3

Move the hands to the upper chest with the index fingers resting on the collar bones, and remaining fingers softly fanned out over the chest. Breathe into the hands by filling the chest with the inhalation, noticing the upward expansion into the hands. Allow the chest, lungs and heart to relax on the exhalation. The movement in this area will be less noticeable, even though the upper lungs come all the way under the collar bones.

Allow the mind to image the front of the body from the pelvic bones to the top of the neck. When the breath is in full expansion and relaxation, the three positions will flow into one, feeling the wave of breath move up the torso on inhalation and down the spine on exhalation. Consider adding a color, sound, temperature or any other sensation to the breath to keep the mind focused.

"Anxiety is the gap between the now and the later."

Where is your attention? Do you live in "the later" more than the now?

Then you are trapped in your thoughts, because what is the future other than a thought in your head? Only your thoughts can make you anxious!

Bring your attention to the now. Seeing, listening, breathing, feeling the aliveness inside your body. Welcome home. – Eckart Tolle

