



How to Breathe

Expert advice on relieving stress and anxiety by bringing awareness to our breath

By **Sandra Ramani**

Breath fuels life, so it's troubling to discover that we are often breathing incorrectly—or are “forgetting” to do it at all. “Slow, deep breathing helps boost our immune system, improve blood flow, increase our energy and lower blood pressure,” explains Andy Kidd, a 20-year wellness industry veteran who leads the Breathe and Relax program at Australia’s Gwinganna Lifestyle Retreat (gwinganna.com). “It’s a simple, extremely effective tool, but, so often, we are actually holding our breath or taking shallow breaths, especially if we are feeling stressed or anxious.”

“Breathing correctly means breathing efficiently, or getting the most air out each breath,” says holistic practitioner Hope Gillerman, founder of the H. Gillerman Organics line of pure essential oil blends (hgillermanorganics.com). “Normal breathing does not have to be a vigorous movement; it can be slow and relaxed, and still be efficient.” But, she explains, factors like chronic congestion in our passages, slouching and not fully exhaling interfere with efficient breathing, as does overconcentrating. “We sit at the computer, our bodies immobile for hours on end as we try to focus, yet our brains are starved for oxygen,” she adds.

Experts all agree that the first step toward correcting these common problems is bringing awareness to our breathing. “One mistake we make is taking our breath for granted,” says Dina Kaplan, a certified meditation teacher and founder of The Path, which offers meditation techniques geared toward “the modern mind” (thepath.com). “But your breath is mapped to your brain, so if you notice it becoming quick, shallow or uneven, you can train yourself to take a moment to fix it.”

Here, each of these pros offers quick and easy tips for breathing for improved focus, relaxation and overall well-being.

Andy Kidd

Leader of Breathe and Relax program at Australia's Gwinganna Lifestyle Retreat

- Remember to breathe deeply and often. Three times a day or more, stop and count to nine exhalations. Then go on.
- Move your body, kindly and gently, letting your breath out all the way. Try rotating your wrists several times each way, then your elbows. Roll your neck gently. Swing your hips. Raise one leg at a time and rotate your ankles each way. This simple routine helps to warm you up, move your energy, free your joints and keep you supple.
- Look to nature as a reminder to deepen your breathing. Walk barefoot on grass, look up at the clouds or listen to the birds. Yoga classes are another wonderful way to improve your breathing techniques.

Dina Kaplan

Certified Meditation Teacher and Founder of The Path

- Check in on your breathing a few times a day to stay relaxed and monitor when you might need to take a break; one warning sign is your breath becoming quicker than normal. Set an alarm on your phone to go off a few times during the day to remind you it's time for a breath check.
- Exhale for a longer period of time than you inhale—you'll feel the benefits of that right away.
- Most Eastern and Western medicine experts will tell you it's healthier to breathe through the nose than the mouth, so be aware of this. It's a common mistake to breathe through the mouth when we feel that our nose is even a little bit stuffed up.

- Practice alternate side nostril breathing. Close all the fingers of your right hand except the thumb and forefinger. Use your thumb to softly push in your right nostril, then breathe into the left nostril for four counts; hold your breath for four counts, then close the left nostril with your forefinger and breathe the air out of your right nostril four counts.

Switch fingers and breathe in through the left nostril, hold for four counts, then exhale through the right nostril. Repeat for two to four minutes. If you need an energy boost, speed up the process; if you need to relax, hold each breath for six counts instead of four.

Hope Gillerman

Founder of H. Gillerman Organics line of pure essential oil blends

- Be aware of your posture. Stress, depression or anxiety can trigger a collapsed posture, which constricts the primary breathing muscle—the diaphragm—as well as back muscles, abdominals and intercostals. The result is that we overuse the wrong muscles to breathe, causing more strain.

To correct this, sit erect in the front of your chair, or move your hips flush against back of the chair for added back support. If you are standing or walking, interlock your fingers and cup your hands at the base of your skull and lift up the back of your head to stretch your spine. Repeat whenever you notice yourself slouching.

- You don't go to a gas station with a full tank—you go when your tank is almost empty and ready to fill up. The same is true with breathing. If you start with an exhale, emptying out your lungs, your next breath will be a full tank of air: minimum effort for maximum oxygen. This will make you feel energized and at ease all at once.

- To know that you are fully exhaling, close your eyes and mindfully follow your exhale to its end, noticing that when you are almost empty, the abdominals start to tighten and the ribs start to narrow and squeeze the chest. Once you feel the slightest strain, release the abdominals and the ribs, and the next breath will come by itself, like a ball bouncing off the ground.

If focusing on your breath makes you uncomfortable, focus on making a sound, like a sigh or whispered “ah,” for the duration of your exhale, or count silently and repeatedly to five until you need to inhale. Everyone is different, so it's good to experiment to find what works best for you.

For more on Better Breathing, see ospa.me/better-breathing