

Simple Breathing Practices For Meditation

Stage one: 1:1 breathing.

The posture for this exercise can be done lying flat on the floor or in a seated position (for meditation purposes) keeping your head, neck and trunk in one line. In one to one breathing you're matching your inhalations to your exhalations. For example if you are breathing in for a count of five then you need to breathe out for a count of five. On your inhalation your belly rises (your diaphragm muscle contracts) such that the ribs flare out slightly, and pulls the bottom of your lungs downward to bring in air. On your exhalation, your belly falls or draws inward to releases the air out.

This is called deep diaphragmatic breathing. When your diaphragm is used for breathing, there is very little motion in the chest. However, with stress-filled lives, bad posture and poor unconscious breathing habits we tend to breathe using the chest.

This practice can be done anytime during the day. Start with taking 20 breaths making sure the length and count of each inhalation is comfortable. You can then work your way up to 50 – 100 breaths or even set a timer for 10 - 15 minutes.

* When your mind becomes focused on your breath only and becomes one-pointed (free of thought) you have entered the starting point of meditation. Eventually let go of your breath count and feel the stillness.

Stage two: 1:2 breathing.

In one to two breathing your exhalations are twice as long as your inhalations. For example, you may regulate your breath so that you inhale for a count of 5 seconds and exhale for a count of 10 seconds. Work with your rates of breathing to find the most comfortable speed for you. Use the ratios 3:6, 4:8, 5:10, 6:12, where the first (smaller) number is the number of seconds of inhalation, and the second (larger) number is the number of seconds of exhalation.

The posture used is the same as 1:1 breathing mentioned above. As with all breathing exercises try to find a relaxing, quiet place to practice. This practice can also be done anytime during the day, starting with 20 or so breaths and working your way up to 50 or 100 breaths. I like to practice this one after a stressful or uncomfortable experience.

Two-to-One breathing has a very relaxing effect on the autonomic nervous system and is a great way to release tensions, toxins and anxieties. Doubling the exhalation allows you to push more carbon dioxide and toxins out of the body bring you into a state of calm and equanimity. Normally your inhalations are longer and deeper than your exhalations. In this practice you are reversing the process so you can come into balance.

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