

Creating Health & Wellness:
**HARNESSING THE
POWER OF BREATH**



Anyone who has witnessed a newborn exhale for the first time can attest to the power of breath.

Amazingly, within seconds, newborns learn to take their native ability to inhale and exhale for granted—a trend that continues as we grow older and our lives become fuller.

As adults, we rarely stop to notice the rhythmic cycle of expansion and contraction that nurtures our bodies, and sustains our lives through our busy days and restful nights.

Most often we breathe on auto-pilot.

What if conscious breathing could help relieve stress... increase your energy... help you sleep better... improve your relationships... transport you to a place of mental quiet where you can connect with your deepest desires... achieve lasting peace of mind... and begin to live a happier, more balanced, and successful life?

Is it possible that something as simple as breathing could open up a new world of nearly limitless potential?

Yes, it is.

In the following pages, you will learn why conscious breathing is so critical to your state of mind and state of being. You'll also learn powerful breathing exercises you can do anywhere that can improve how you feel, physically, emotionally and mentally.

HOW BREATHING IMPACTS YOUR WHOLE BEING

After watching a person who is angry or upset, you quickly understand how fundamental breathing is to your state of mind, and state of being. Agitated emotional states often make your breathing fast, shallow, even irregular and noisy. In fact, your breathing is so deeply connected to your emotional state that most people are incapable of feeling upset when their breathing is deep, slow, regular and quiet¹.

“The single most effective relaxation technique I know is conscious regulation of breath.”²

DR. ANDREW WEIL. M.D.

¹ Andrew Weil, M.D., Breathing: An Introduction, <http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/id/ART00519>

² Andrew Weil, M.D., Breathing: An Introduction, <http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/id/ART00519>



Whatever the benefits of conscious breathing, being attentive to your breath is not a biological imperative. Your ability to breathe is connected to two parts of the nervous system, which gives you the ability to breathe automatically (involuntarily), or through conscious effort, known as voluntary breathing. For example, breathing is involuntary (automatic) when you sleep, but voluntary when you stop strenuous exercise to “catch your breath.”

What we neglect to realize is how shallow and fast our day-to-day breathing so often is. As we rush through our days, we fail to reap the life-changing benefits of deeper, more restorative breathing.

“People who eat excellent diets and exercise faithfully are not always healthy, but the likelihood of being a healthy person who does not breathe well is slim” ³

- DR. ANDREW WEIL. M.D.

ARE YOU A “CHEST” BREATHER?

“Chest” breathing is probably the most common form of day-to-day breathing. Rapid and shallow, “chest” breathing limits the amount of expansion and contraction that can occur during a given breath, which then restricts air exchange.

To find out if you are a “chest” breather, place your right hand on your chest and your left hand on your abdomen (your belly). Breathe, and notice which hand rises more.

If your right hand rises more, you are a chest breather. If your left hand rises more, you are an abdomen breather. Abdomen breathing is a deeper, more beneficial form of breathing, and is often used in yoga. ⁴

³ Andrew Weil, M.D., Breathing: Basic How-To's, <http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/id/ART00520>

⁴ American Medical Student Association, Health Hint: Breathing Exercises, <http://www.amsa.org/healingthehealer/breathing.cfm>



Guiding Your Breath Toward Improved State of Mind and Body Given that breathing is essential to your energy and how you feel on multiple levels, breath is often described as the bridge between your mind and body. Learning to breathe in a way that promotes stronger positive energy is critical to achieving a happier, more productive state of mind and being.

“By quieting your breath,
you quiet your mind.”⁵

DR. DEEPAK CHOPRA, M.D.

Training yourself to breathe in a more productive way is a practice you can incorporate at any time, in any place, whether for twenty seconds or twenty minutes.

In the following pages, you will learn seven exercises that can:

- Relax, restore, and rejuvenate you
- Increase your energy
- Quiet your mind at the end of a busy day
- Bring you lasting peace of mind
- Reconnect you to your authentic self to rediscover your deepest dreams and desires
- Help you to heal from past events
- Better enable you to handle challenging emotions, such as anger, fear, anxiety, and others, to lighten your emotional burden and reconnect you to your inner bliss



“Breathing exercises are a wonderful way to reduce anxiety, agitation and stress, while promoting relaxation, calm and inner peace.”⁶

- DR. ANDREW WEIL, M.D.

The following exercises are simple, and can be used by just about anyone. Keep in mind that learning to quiet your mind and restore your health and happiness through intentional breathing is a habit that may take time to master.

Whether in short twenty second bursts or longer stretches, all of these exercises have the potential to help you live a more fulfilling life—particularly when they’re practiced on a frequent, consistent basis.

EXERCISE #1: AN INTRODUCTION TO OBSERVING YOUR BREATH

Description: This exercises takes only a few minutes, and is a great first step toward learning you how to use your breathing to relax.

- Whether sitting in a parked car, your office, or anywhere you can sit still, take a brief moment to get comfortable.
- Close your eyes, and begin to notice your breathing. Don’t try to control it. Just try to focus on it, without judgement.
- When your mind begins to wander, gently redirect it back to your breathing, the rhythmic cycle of inhalation and exhalation. Each time your mind is distracted by noises, or other thoughts or stimuli, try to bring it back to your breath.
- When you are ready, open your eyes and take a deep inhalation, followed by a slow, long exhalation.

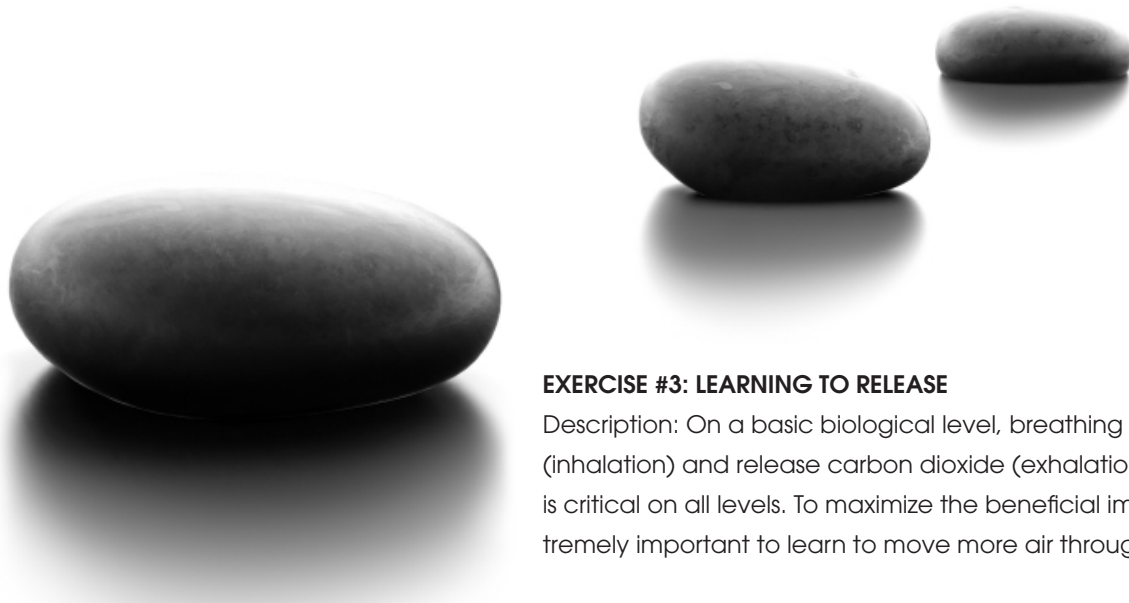
EXERCISE #2: MOVING YOUR BREATH⁷

Description: In this exercise you will learn to connect with your conscious breathing, and effectively move your breath. It’s quick and easy, and something you should do as often as possible.

- Find a comfortable place to sit. Straighten your back, which helps to make space for more air to move in and out of your lungs.
- Begin by sighing deeply and audibly, and then inhale quietly.
- Try to make your breathing as slow, deep, quiet and regular as you can without causing yourself any discomfort. Throughout this entire exercise you should always feel that you are getting enough air.
- Repeat this for at least ten breaths.

⁶ Andrew Weil, M.D., The Art and Science of Breathing, <http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART02039/the-art-and-science-of-breathing.html>

⁷ Andrew Weil, M.D., Breathing: Basic How-To’s, <http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/id/ART00520>



EXERCISE #3: LEARNING TO RELEASE

Description: On a basic biological level, breathing enables us to take in oxygen (inhalation) and release carbon dioxide (exhalation). This entire process, of course, is critical on all levels. To maximize the beneficial impact of our breathing, it's extremely important to learn to move more air through our bodies on a regular basis.

One important step toward achieving this is by learning to exhale with intention, which allows you to release more carbon dioxide, and then take in more oxygen on the next inhale. Even when people are practicing voluntary, or intentional, breathing, they often make effort to inhale, but then exhale passively, which typically results in short, inadequate exhalations.

- Take a normal breath, and try to push more air out at the end of your exhalation. When you intentionally prolong your exhale like this, you may feel like you're compressing your rib cage. This is normal, and nothing to worry about.
- Take a second breath, beginning by inhaling deeply, and then try extending your exhalation a bit longer.
- Continue this cycle for at least three breaths.⁸

EXERCISE #4: THE STIMULATING BREATH⁹

Description: When done properly, this exercise will make you more alert. As you perform this exercise, you will feel the effort in your chest, diaphragm, abdomen, and at the back of your neck. This exercise is a bit noisy, but can give you a great energy boost very quickly.

- To begin, inhale and exhale rapidly through your nose, keeping your mouth closed but relaxed. Your breaths in and out should be as short as possible, but equal in duration.
- Aim for three in-and-out breath cycles per second, which produces a quick movement of your diaphragm. Breathe normally after each cycle.
- On your first try, remain seated (with a straightened back), and do not do this exercise for more than 15 seconds.
- Each time you practice the Stimulating Breath, you can increase your time by five seconds, until you reach a full minute.

⁸ Andrew Weil, M.D., Breathing: Three Exercises, <http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART00521/three-breathing-exercises.html>

⁹ Andrew Weil, M.D., Breathing: Three Exercises, <http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART00521/three-breathing-exercises.html>



EXERCISE #5: RELAXING BREATH

Description: This is an amazingly simple, adaptable exercise that has a powerful calming effect, like a natural tranquilizer. Because it helps to dissipate nervous tension and emotional disturbances, the type of breathing used in this exercise can relax and rebalance you immediately after something upsetting happens. It can also quiet your mind after a long day. The beneficial effects of this exercise actually increase over time, so use it as often as possible, at least twice a day.

- This exercise can ultimately be done in any position, but when you first try it, sit in a comfortable place with your back straight.
- Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge just behind your upper front teeth. Keep it there throughout the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue. It may help to purse your lips slightly.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of FOUR.
- Hold your breath for a count of SEVEN.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of EIGHT. Each 4-7-8 cycle is counted as one breath.
- Inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

Note: This exercise is also known as the 4-7-8 breath. You always inhale quietly through your nose and exhale audibly through your mouth. Each exhalation should take twice as long as each inhalation. The duration of each inhalation or exhalation is irrelevant, but you must maintain the ratio of 4:7:8 by counting, as directed. If you find it difficult to hold your breath, speed up the exercise while maintaining the ratio of 4:7:8 throughout. With practice you will be able to slow down and learn to inhale and exhale more deeply and for longer periods of time.¹⁰

¹⁰ Andrew Weil, M.D., Breathing: Three Exercises, <http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART00521/three-breathing-exercises.html>



EXERCISE #6: HANDLE YOUR EMOTIONS

Description: This exercise teaches you a simple yet powerful way to deal more effectively with challenging emotions, such as fear, anger, anxiety, and resentment. With practice you can learn to connect with all of your emotions, both positive and negative, and clear your heart and mind of emotional blocks. By doing this exercise on a consistent, frequent basis, you may be better able to heal from past events, and create a deep and lasting connection with your inner bliss.

- To begin, sit quietly in a comfortable position, and close your eyes.
- Take a deep breath, and let yourself feel all the sensations in your body without judgement.
- Let all your feelings and thoughts come out. Allow all the diverse energies you're holding in your body to be released. To do this, you will likely need to let yourself experience fear, anxiety, anger and other challenging emotions. As difficult as this may be, it is important to trust in this process, and let yourself feel all the emotions that naturally come out.
- Continue to experience your emotions for as long as you like. As your body releases emotional energy, try to feel your whole body with your whole being.
- With time you may begin to feel lighter, less burdened. When this happens, allow your body to bubble with energy and bliss.
- When you are ready, open your eyes, and observe the new state of bliss you have created in your body.



EXERCISE #7: BREATH COUNTING ¹¹

Description: This exercise is more advanced, adapted from Zen practice. However simple it may seem, you will likely find it takes a great deal of practice. The goal of this exercise is to harness your mind by directing your focus to the counting of breaths. This exercise may be most effective when practiced often, and for longer periods of time.

- To begin, sit in a comfortable position, being sure to straighten your back. Tilt your head slightly forward.
- Close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths.
- Begin counting each exhalation (do not count your inhalations). The first exhalation is "one," the second exhalation is "two," and so on. Keep counting your exhalations until you reach five.
- After counting to five, begin again, never going beyond a count of five.
- When you find yourself counting to six or higher, you will know that your attention has veered away from counting your breath. Each time this happens, simply return to focusing on your breath, and begin again.

"By continuing to bring our minds back to the moment through the simple act of breathing, we gradually inspire a mindful tranquility and content awareness." ¹²

- DAILYOM.COM

¹¹ Andrew Weil, M.D., Breathing: Three Exercises, <http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART00521/three-breathing-exercises.html>

¹² Simple Path to a Focused Mind, <http://www.dailyom.com/articles/2004/226.html> (August 13, 2004).



CONCLUSION

As you learn to incorporate these exercises into your daily routine, you can use your practice of conscious breathing to lead you toward a happier, more balanced, and successful life. Over time, you may discover that the benefits of conscious breathing- better relationships, greater happiness, and lasting peace of mind, to name just a few - begin to manifest themselves in your life. It is then that you will understand the truly profound power of each breath you take.