

six breathing techniques to reduce stress

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It doesn't have the solutions to your big problems, but the skills inside can make coping a **little** easier when life is difficult.

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Learning how to reduce my stress with breathing techniques is important to me because:

► Tips for Breathing Practice

In order to experience the benefits of the following six breathing techniques, you should commit to practicing **at least once per day for two weeks**.

Each practice session should be **at least 5 minutes long**. Shorter sessions may not give you the same benefits as practice sessions that are 5 minutes or longer. Practicing with an automatic timer is recommended so you don't have to think about keeping track of time while you practice each breathing technique.

For the best results, you should also **inhale through your nose** when practicing the following techniques. You may exhale through your nose or mouth, whatever is more comfortable.

► Caution

Some breathing techniques may be uncomfortable the first few times you try them. You may feel that you are getting too much air, or not enough. When learning new breathing techniques, some people may even feel lightheaded or dizzy.

You should always be comfortably seated or lying down in a safe area when practicing breathing techniques. Never practice these techniques while driving or doing other activities.

If you feel lightheaded, dizzy, or uncomfortable, pause your practice and breathe normally until the sensation passes. If you find it difficult to breathe normally, you can engage in a distracting activity (while remaining seated or lying down) until your breath feels natural and normal again.

Most people find that these uncomfortable sensations go away with regular practice – if they feel them at all.

The following six breathing techniques are in order from more simple to more challenging, with the simpler techniques less likely to make you feel lightheaded or dizzy.

► Slow Mindful Breathing

This is the simplest breathing technique. Find a comfortable position either sitting or lying down. Set a timer for at least 5 minutes and quietly observe the sensations of each inhale and exhale. If your attention wanders, gently bring it back to your breath. Many people notice their breathing deepens and slows naturally when they quietly observe each inhale and exhale.

► Diaphragmatic Breathing

This technique is easier to learn while lying flat on your back, in bed or on another comfortable surface. But you can also practice this technique from a comfortable sitting position.

1. Place one open hand on your upper chest and place the other on your abdomen just below your ribcage.
2. Inhale slowly and allow the breath to fill your stomach, lifting your bottom hand. The top hand on your chest should remain as still as possible as you inhale.
3. Exhale slowly and allow your stomach and bottom hand to move back in, keeping the top hand on your chest as still as possible. Breathe out all the air as you exhale. *Repeat.*

► Cyclic Sighing

Breathe in through your nose until your lungs are expanded. Then, before you exhale, take a second deeper breath in to fill your lungs all the way – the second inhale is usually briefer than the first. Then, **slowly** exhale all the breath through your mouth or nose. Repeat at whatever pace feels comfortable.

Record each day you practice a breathing technique:

Week 1 ○○○○○○○○

Week 2 ○○○○○○○○

► Longer Exhale Breathing

If you observe your own heart rate, you will notice that it speeds up slightly each time you inhale, and then slows down when you exhale. This is why many breathing techniques emphasize longer exhales, which activate the body's natural relaxation response.

Try counting silently as you breathe in and out. Pace your breath so your exhales are longer than your inhales. Try out different breathing patterns until you find one that works for you, counting at whatever pace feels comfortable. Here are some options:

- Breathe in for 4 counts, breathe out for 6 counts.
- Breathe in for 4 counts, breathe out for 8 counts.
- Breathe in for 5 counts, breathe out for 7 counts.

► 4-7-8 Breathing

This is a modification of longer exhale breathing. Remember to count at whatever pace feels comfortable.

1. Inhale as you count silently from 1 to 4.
2. Hold your breath as you count from 1 to 7.
3. Exhale as you count from 1 to 8. *Repeat.*

► Alternate Nostril Breathing

Yoga breathing techniques like alternate nostril breathing have been practiced for thousands of years.

1. Gently press your thumb to the side of your right nostril. With your right nostril closed, take a slow deep breath in through your left nostril. Then breathe out slowly and deeply through your left nostril.
2. Release your right nostril and gently press your left nostril closed with your ring finger. Take a slow deep breath in through your right nostril. Then breathe out slowly and deeply through your right nostril. *Repeat.*