

Educational Tool

Breathing Tools for Anxiety & Sleep

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Guideline for selecting the right tool(s) for you

Try out more than one tool and select the ones that are the easiest, most natural, and most effective for you.

INSTRUCTIONS:

What to Do When You're Stressed (That Most People Get Wrong):

1. Do NOT take a deep breath.
2. Instead, **focus on the exhale, using a long, slow and complete exhale** through your nose. You may exhale through your mouth if instructed to do so in a breathing exercise or if it's more comfortable.

Why breathe through your nose? Nasal breathing removes carbon dioxide effectively, which can make you feel calmer and better. It also can improve learning and memory. Much of the stress response comes from a failure to adequately regulate carbon dioxide. Try breathing through your nose except when eating or talking.

For Calm, Focus, & Emotional Balance

Option 1: Alternate Nostril Breathing

Use to reset the nervous system: The right nostril increases the sympathetic nervous system (energy, focus) and the left nostril increases parasympathetic activity (calm, relaxation). Alternating between the two systems balances brain hemispheres, increases slow (theta) EEG waves, and creates equilibrium and calm.

1. Use your right hand for the exercise. Using your RIGHT THUMB, CLOSE the RIGHT nostril. EXHALE completely and then INHALE deeply and slowly through your LEFT nostril.
2. Using the same hand, switch nostrils using the RIGHT INDEX finger to CLOSE the LEFT nostril on the same hand and exhale slowly through your right nostril.
3. Inhale through that same [right] nostril. This is one cycle.
4. Switch nostrils and repeat the cycle, always alternating nostrils after the inhale.
5. Start and finish with an exhale on the left side and the right nostril closed.

The Pattern: After every inhale, switch nostrils and fingers. Exhale then inhale with each nostril. Then switch.

Option 2: Box Breathing

Use box breathing to maintain equilibrium. It helps you keep a balanced ratio of oxygen and carbon dioxide, so your alertness and focus are steady.

1. Inhale for 4 seconds.
2. Hold your breath for 4 seconds.
3. Exhale for 4 seconds.
4. Hold your breath for 4 seconds.
5. Repeat this cycle for a few minutes or while you are not talking.

Option 2 Adapted from Huberman (2023)

To Calm Anxiety and/or Facilitate Sleep

Option 1: Double Time Exhale Hold & Release 6 - 6 -12

1. Inhale to the count of 6 (or 3 if more comfortable).
2. Hold your breath to the count of 6 (or 3).
3. Exhale to the count of 12 (or 6)

Repeat for several rounds, or as needed, to calm down.

Option 2: Measured Hold & Release 4 - 6 - 7

1. Breathe in through your nose to a count of 4.
2. Hold your breath for a count of 7.
3. Breathe out slowly and forcefully through your mouth for a count of 8, making a 'whoosh' sound as you let the air out. This may be easier if you purse your lips.

Repeat for several rounds or as needed.

Option 1 Adapted from Huberman (2023)

To Calm Down Quickly

Option 1: Physiological Sigh

1. Inhale through your nose.
2. Sneak in another quick inhale towards the end of the inhale.
3. Exhale with your nose or mouth and empty out all the air.
4. Repeat 2-3 times or more to feel calmer in your mind and body in bed or anywhere when you are anxious.

Option 2: Blowing Bubbles

1. Imagine you are blowing bubbles (Consider buying bubbles to practice or even use when home).
2. Exhale with loosely pursed lips in an "O" shape very slowly and steadily to release the bubble, letting out all the air in your lungs. as if blowing a bubble.
3. Blow the next imaginary bubble.
4. Blow another.
5. Repeat for at least 3 bubbles or until calm.

Option 1 Adapted from Huberman (2023)

To Quiet the Mind & Facilitate Sleep

Counting Breaths

1. Breathe in.
2. Count “1” as you breathe out with a long, slow exhale.
3. Breathe in again.
4. Count “2” as you breathe out with a long, slow exhale again.
5. Continue breathing and counting until you get to 10.
6. Then start from 1 again and repeat.

If a thought comes into your mind, gently and quietly return to counting and focusing on your breath.

OPTIONAL (if you are visual): Imagine an image of the number in your mind as you do this to help clear your mind.

Reference:

Huberman Lab. (2023, October 6). Breathwork protocols for health, focus & stress [Newsletter]. Huberman Lab.
<https://www.hubermanlab.com/newsletter/breathwork-protocols-for-health-focus-stress#breathing-for-stress-reduction>

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