



5 TIPS FOR BETTER BREATHING

Martin Petrus

DISCLAIMER:

The contents of this document should not be treated as medical advice. Breathing exercises may be not suitable for people with epilepsy, heart disease, high blood pressure, migraines, panic attacks, diabetes, thyroid conditions or during pregnancy.

Never perform breathing exercises in water.

If in doubt, consult a health practitioner in advance.

Breathing is our most fundamental function. **The way we breathe influences all other activities of our body.** Through breathing, we can influence our cardiovascular, hormonal and immune system.

This function is mostly autonomous, therefore we don't often pay any attention to how we breathe. **The good news is that our respiratory system is also under our conscious control.** By changing the speed or depth of our breathing, we can change how we feel, improve our health and wellbeing, and possibly increase longevity.

Here are **5 tips** on how you can improve your everyday breathing to feel and perform better in life:

Tip #1

Observe

MINDFULLY WATCHING YOUR BREATH

#1 Observe

It seems too simple to do nothing – it feels like we should have to do something to get a specific result. **Sometimes, all it takes is to observe how we breathe.** Our breathing is connected with our nervous system. Often, if we are stressed, our breathing rate will be faster. The state which is often described as “fight or flight” is when the body prepares for action - stress hormones are released, blood sugar levels are elevated, our heart beats faster and our breathing rate is more rapid.

By observing the way that we breathe, we can monitor our emotional state. Sometimes, realising that we are in a more intensive state is enough to be able to take a step back and distance ourselves.

We can also observe how we are breathing - which parts of our body are moving? If the upper chest is inflating with every inhalation, and our shoulders are moving, it can mean that we are in a more agitated state. A simple method to **bring the breath down to our belly** can be very grounding and relaxing.

Observing our breath can get us centred and grounded, bringing us to the present moment. This is the most basic form of meditation and concentration practice. The mind has a tendency to constantly produce thoughts about the past or the future. This can produce fear, anxiety or even depression. How can we be happy with what we have if we constantly compare it to the positive memories from the past or expect something good to happen in the future? Focusing on our breathing can be a solution. If we are breathing, we are alive, and that's the most important consideration.

Importantly, observing the breath can be a method of self-development. This is how the Buddha reached **enlightenment**.

Tip #2

Use your diaphragm

ENGAGE THE MOST IMPORTANT MUSCLE IN YOUR BODY

#2 Use your diaphragm

The diaphragm is the **primary muscle that we use for breathing**. It is a large, dome-shaped muscle located under our ribs. When we breathe in, our brains send a signal to this muscle to move down. This creates a difference in pressure in our lungs, pulling in air. When we relax, the diaphragm goes back up and the air is pushed out of the lungs. This give us a clue as to how we should be optimising our breathing. When we inhale, the action of the diaphragm moving down should create a gentle expansion in the abdominal section. In other words, breathing with our belly is considered the most optimal and healthy method. Using our belly to breathe doesn't mean we have to push it out and forcefully inflate with every inhale. It only means that when we take a breath in, we should be feeling a slight expansion of the belly and the lower ribs. If, on inhalation, our belly is not moving, then another part of our body will have to compensate - most probably the upper chest and the shoulders.

If we are using our diaphragm in the right way, we will see many benefits. In most cases, belly breathing will be more relaxing than upper chest breathing. If someone is getting ready for action, they will inflate the upper part of the body - we want to do the opposite of that. It is much easier to be relaxed than ready for action.

The diaphragm plays an important role in our core stabilisation, and has an effect on our posture. Belly breathing can help to activate the lymphatic system in our bodies, which contributes to detoxification. This can also provide a great massage for vital organs.

Because the diaphragm is our primary muscle for breathing, using it properly can improve the efficiency of our body. If our diaphragm is stronger, our breathing is better.

Tip #3

Nose

USE THE UPPER AIRWAYS

#3 Nose

It is perfectly acceptable to breathe through the mouth, although most of the time, we should be breathing through our nose. Sometimes, we might be so accustomed to breathing through our mouth that any other way will feel uncomfortable. As soon as we switch to **permanent nose breathing, it becomes easy and natural** – and is a healthier method.

Our **nose acts as a filter** for the air that we take into our lungs, stopping tiny particles of dust, and also some pathogens. The nose also regulates the temperature of the air - in the summer it cools it down and in the winter, it warms it up. Nose breathing can also increase the amount of oxygen that we are delivering to our cells. Nose breathing will increase the amount of Nitric Oxide that you are breathing in, expanding the blood vessels in the lungs.

During the day, you should try to use the nose for breathing. Even if you feel an urge to bring more air into the body, such as when you are running or exerting yourself, try to stay with it. As with many changes you may make in life, there is an adaptation period after which it gets easier and discomfort disappears.

Nose breathing during the night can improve the **quality of your sleep**. As we know, the quality of our sleep determines our health. If you wake up and your mouth is dry, that is a sign that you have been breathing through your mouth during the night. A simple solution would be to use a nose dilator - a device that you can buy in a pharmacy to improve airflow through the nostrils. A more advanced solution is to use tape to keep the mouth closed throughout the whole night. It is not as bad as it sounds and the effects are amazing!

Tip #4

Energise

INCREASE THE POWER

#5 Energise

One of the most common complaints is a lack of energy. This can lead to feeling tired during the day, and not being able to concentrate. There could be many causes of this, from adrenal fatigue to a lack of sleep. The ideal solution is to address the real cause of the lack of energy. If all the base causes are addressed and no solution is obvious, you can use Breathwork to get a temporary **boost of energy**.

This can be done at any point in the day when you feel run down. Performing a few dynamic exhalations through the nose can also have a **cleansing effect** - in the yogic tradition, this is known as the Shining Skull Breath. It is used for getting rid of old, stale air and pulling in new, fresh air, **cleansing the mind and improving blood circulation**. At every exhalation we are also pulling the belly in, which is a great warm-up for our diaphragm. The movement of the abdomen also helps to move the lymph, clearing our body of toxins.

This exercise works best when done on empty stomach. It is great as a practice for the start of the day. Sit down comfortably, establishing your position on the ground. Ideally aim for a lotus position, keeping the spine straight throughout the whole exercise. Start to exhale dynamically through the nose, at the speed of one breath per second. Every time you exhale, pull the belly in. Follow that with a passive recoil of the belly, which pulls the air back into the lungs. Do ten breaths, keeping a rhythm of one exhalation per second. After a short pause, try to do another set of ten breaths.

When performed in the right way - with full engagement - this can be a very powerful practice giving you an instant boost of energy. In the longer term, this is also a great **exercise for the diaphragm**.

Tip #5

Relax

DOWNREGULATE YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

#5 Relax

In today's hectic, busy world, it is easy to get overwhelmed. Being bombarded with information and digital stimuli, we can sometimes find it hard to relax. Our body has an innate ability to generate a stress response. That is our protective mechanism - we need to be able to switch to full action mode in a split second. This is triggered from the ancient requirement to react effectively under threat – such as a wild animal waiting around the corner! Nowadays, this mechanism can be triggered by a perceived threat such as public speaking, taxes, emails and news. Many times, the brain does not distinguish between a real threat and a perceived threat and will respond with a stress reaction. **The need for relaxation in the modern world is greater than ever.**

So, what can we do to be more relaxed? Breathwork is one of our best tools for this purpose. **The vagus nerve** is one of the most important elements of our nervous system. When we breathe consciously, we are stimulating the vagus nerve, and especially the branch responsible for activating the relaxation response.

Our body loves rhythms. Not only the external ones like circadian rhythms, seasons, tides and cycles, but also the internal ones - our heartbeat, blood pressure and of course breathing rate. By implementing a specific breathing rhythm, we can slow down all the systems in our body. Try it yourself.

Pick a count of four seconds, for example, and start breathing in this rhythm: **four seconds inhale, four seconds exhale**. Keep breathing through the nose at this pace for a few minutes and feel how the body relaxes. Ensure that your mind is focused, so other thoughts are not disturbing you. If this feels comfortable, you can extend the cadence to six seconds: inhale for six seconds and exhale for six seconds. You could even add a breath hold on the inhale and exhale, so the final sequence could be inhale, hold, exhale, hold, and repeat. Play around with the variations and tempos, find one that suits you. If you feel you are getting warmer, that is because your blood vessels are opening up. If you feel more saliva in your mouth, then it is a signal that your **rest and digest** functions are activated. Try this pattern before sleep and you should feel the benefits!



Martin Petrus

BREATHWORK COACH

Martin's breathwork journey started when he met Wim Hof. This is when he learned how changing breathing patterns can shift the mental state and break through emotional barriers.

At the same time he started learning respiratory physiology from the founder of Oxygen Advantage, Patrick McKeown.

Now trying to connect the scientific and spiritual by studying Transformational Breath®.

Martin runs regular workshops where he focuses on mindset training using breathwork and coldexposure. He also coaches athletes with modern hypoxic training methods and traditional Pranayama techniques.

MartinPetrus.com