



# HOW TO BREATHE



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# WHY BREATHING MATTERS

## BREATH AND BODY

Breathing is often something we take for granted, not paying much attention to this automatic process. Our bodies keep us breathing to keep us alive, but when we pause to notice our breath, it's clear there's more to it.

Our breathing can change based on what is happening around or within us. If we are stressed or anxious, our breathing might become shallow and fast. If we're resting or relaxed, our breathing tends to slow and deepen.

By focusing on our breath or practicing a breathing exercise, we can calm our bodies and our minds. A deep breath or a centering practice can positively impact our entire body and is fundamental to well-being.

# 25,000

*approximate number of breaths per day*

"Research shows changing the way we breathe can influence weight, athletic performance, allergies, asthma, snoring, mood, stress, focus and so much more." \*

BREATHE IN  
DEEPLY TO  
BRING YOUR  
MIND HOME TO  
YOUR BODY.

– THICH NHAT HANH

# HOW TO BREATHE

The following guide was created to provide directions for guided breathing exercises. Each exercise can be done in a variety of settings, while in a variety of positions, and with eyes open or closed. There is no "right" way, time, or place to practice these breathing exercises, and you are invited to try them out in a way that works for you. There are exercises for integrating your senses and surroundings into your practice as well. Explore what makes you feel safe, secure, calm, and able to connect with your body, breath, or surroundings.

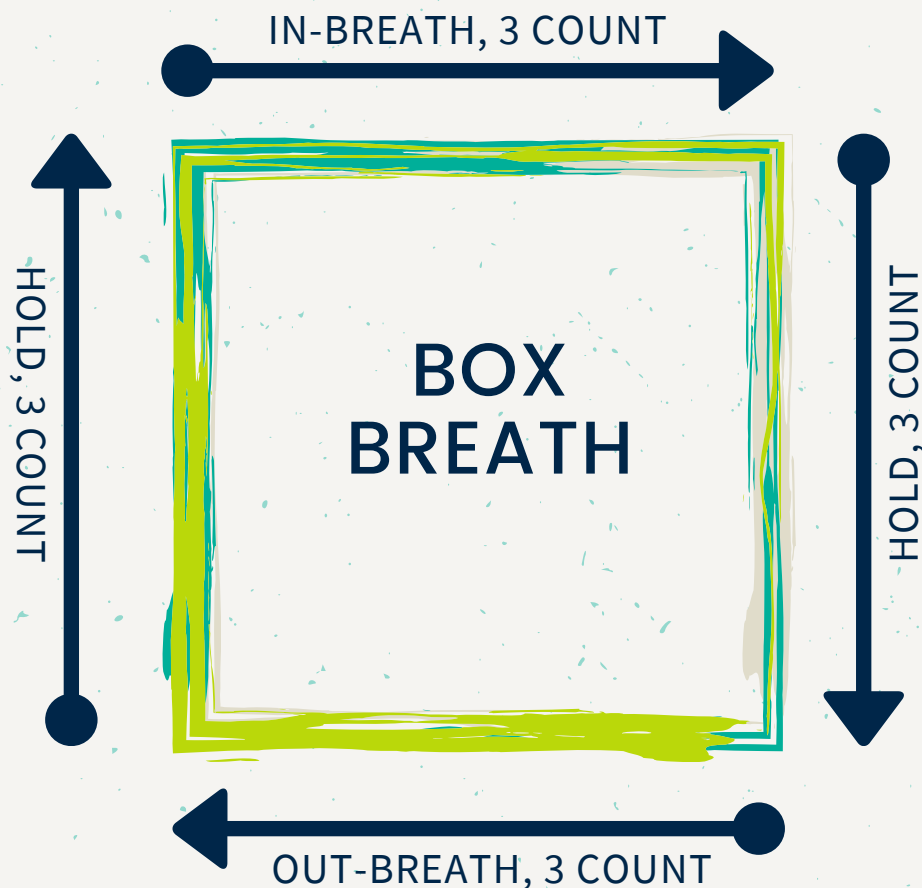
For additional information, contact [McWell@nd.edu](mailto:McWell@nd.edu).

# BOX BREATH

This breath offers a calming moment as you work to match all four elements of your breath to the same length.

1. Breathe in for a count of 3.
2. Hold for a count of 3.
3. Breathe out for a count of 3.
4. Hold for a count of 3.

Once you've found a comfortable rhythm, try deepening the breath by lengthening the count.



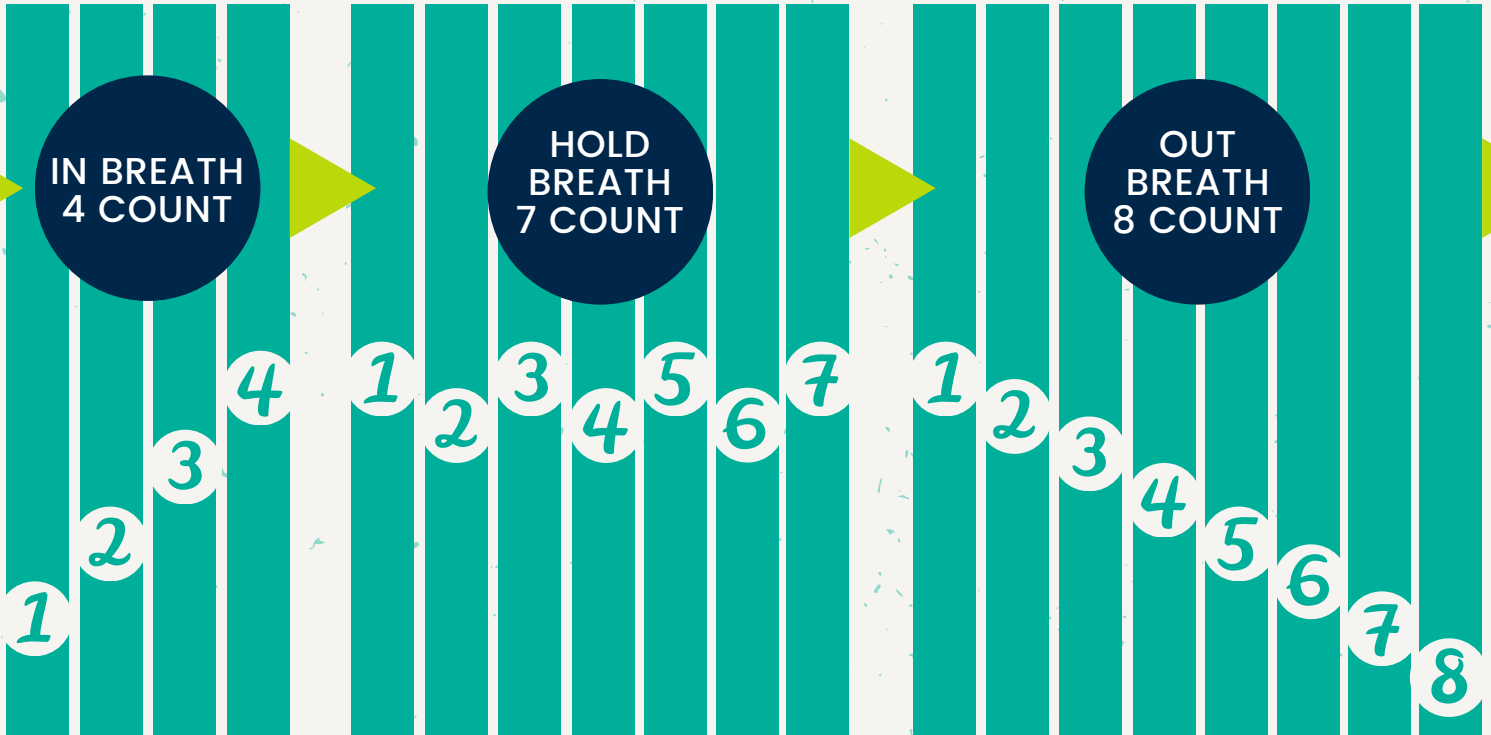
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# 4 - 7 - 8 BREATH

Deepening your out breath engages the parasympathetic nervous system and physiologically calms your body.

1. Breathe in for a count of 4.
2. Hold for a count of 7.
3. Breathe out for a count of 8.
4. Repeat 10-15 times or until calm.



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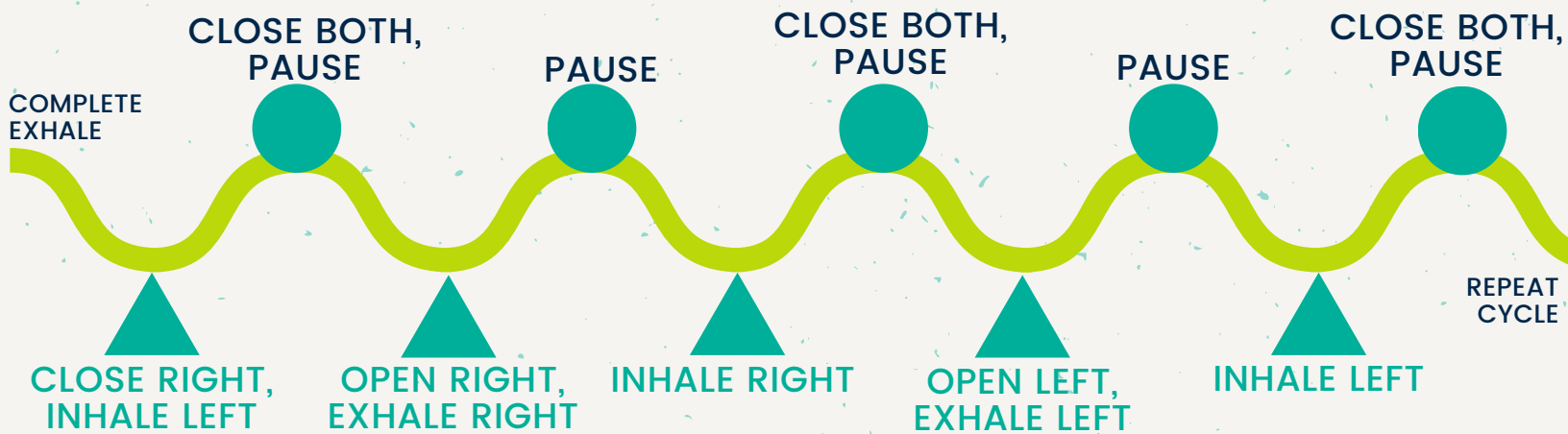
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# ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING

This breath can reduce stress and anxiety.

1. Place your right pointer and middle finger on your forehead.
2. Take a deep breath in and out through your nose, exhaling completely.
3. Close your right nostril with your right thumb.
4. Inhale through the left nostril.
5. Close the left nostril with your ring finger so both nostrils are held closed; hold your breath for a brief pause.
6. Open your right nostril and release your breath slowly through the right side; pause briefly.
7. Inhale through the right side slowly.
8. Hold both nostrils closed (with ring finger and thumb).
9. Open your left nostril and release breath slowly through the left side.
10. Pause briefly at the bottom.

Adapted from: <https://chopra.com/articles/nadi-shodhana-how-to-practice-alternate-nostril-breathing>



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# DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATH

This deep breathing exercise engages your diaphragm in your breath, calming your body and centering your breath.

1. Lie on your back with one hand resting on your belly, just below the peak where your ribs come together. The other hand can rest gently on your chest.
2. Take a breath in, expanding your belly and ribs, and hiss it out in pulses. You should feel your diaphragm bounce with each pulse.
3. Once you've located your diaphragm, relax your belly, ribs, and chest and allow your body to find a natural breathing rhythm.
4. Slowly begin to deepen your breath, noticing how your diaphragm moves and your chest remains still with each breath.
5. Deepen your breath by slowing your inhalation and exhalation and allowing your diaphragm to help fill and empty your lungs with each breath.

**Imagine filling a balloon in your belly with every in breath.**

**Imagine emptying that same balloon with every out breath.**



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# ENERGIZING BREATH

When you need a quick pick-me-up, this breath can offer a good dose of awakening oxygen to your brain and body.

1. If you are comfortable and able, stand up.
2. Close your mouth, and breathe rapidly in and out through your nostrils.
3. Form your arms into chicken wings. With each in-breath, raise them. With each out-breath, lower them, using your elbows to help expel air out of your lungs.
4. Add your body into the breath by bending your knees. Straighten and raise yourself up with each in-breath. Bend your knees and lower yourself with each out breath.
5. Laughing while looking like a dancing chicken is a bonus side effect.



Breathe **IN**  
through nostrils.  
Raise chicken  
wing arms.  
Straighten knees.



Breathe **OUT**  
through nostrils.  
Lower chicken  
wing arms.  
Bend knees.



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# SOAK IN THE SUNSHINE

While this breathing exercise can be especially useful on a sunny day, soaking in the "sunshine" can be literal or metaphorical. If the warmth of the sun isn't available to you at this moment, imagine the warmth of some other bit of goodness in your life.

1. If you are comfortable and in a safe place, close your eyes.
2. Notice the sensations of warmth on your face, skin, or within your being.
3. With every in-breath, breathe in sunshine, peace, warmth, light, or love.
4. With every out-breath, breathe out stress, tension, or negativity.



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# GROUNDING SENSES

Sometimes focusing on our breath can be more stressful than helpful. There are many other places we can focus our attention for a short, grounding practice.

1. Notice **five** things you can **see**. (Look around, bring your attention to things you might otherwise not notice.)
2. Notice **four** things you can **feel**. (Bring your attention to things you are currently feeling, such as the texture of your clothes.)
3. Notice **three** things you can **hear**. (Bring your attention to things you hear in the background.)
4. Notice **two** things you can **smell**. (Bring your attention to smells you might otherwise filter out.)
5. Notice **one** thing you can **taste**. (Focus on one thing you can taste right now, such as the taste in your mouth or a sip of your drink.)

5



4



3



2



1



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# BODY SCAN

Taking a moment to check in with our bodies, focusing on where there is tension and inviting relaxation can be a very grounding experience.

1. Find a comfortable position for your body and close your eyes if you feel safe and comfortable to do so.
2. Begin by focusing your attention on your toes and feet. Notice any sensations. If there is tension or tightness, invite your muscles to relax.
3. Slowly shift your attention upward, through your legs, torso, arms, shoulders, neck and ending with your head. Spend as much or as little time on each area of your body as feels right for you.
4. After scanning your body, pause for a moment to offer a thought of gratitude for the many things your body allows you to accomplish and supports you in doing.

**Begin with  
your toes.**



**Notice tension.  
Invite relaxation.**



**End at  
your head.**



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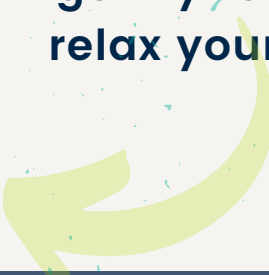
# PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

By tensing our muscles and then fully releasing them, we can invite a deep sense of relaxation into our bodies.

1. Find a comfortable position for your body and close your eyes if you feel safe and comfortable to do so.
2. Begin by focusing your attention on your toes and feet. As you breathe in, tighten the muscles in your toes and feet. Allow the tension to release as you breathe out.
3. Slowly shift your attention upward, through your legs, torso, arms, shoulders, neck and ending with your head. As you pause on each set of muscles, tighten them with your in-breath and release them with your out-breath.
4. As you move your attention through your body, notice the lovely sense of heaviness and calm that exists as you release the tension.



**With each in-breath,  
gently tighten (don't  
strain) your muscles.**



**With each out-breath,  
gently release and  
relax your muscles.**



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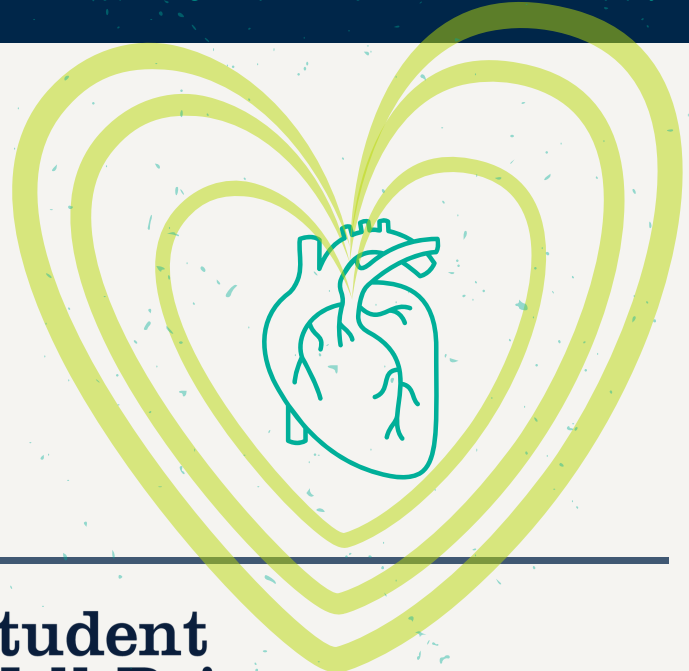
# HEART BREATH

Visualizing using your heart to inhale and exhale is a balancing and centering practice that can also provide an opportunity to connect to compassion. Even a few repetitions can change your physiology and mindset.

1. Sit quietly and soften your gaze or close your eyes.
2. Bring your attention to your breath. Notice that you are already breathing. Notice how it is sustaining you.
3. Imagine that your heart is breathing. That you are breathing through your heart, and that it expands and moves in time with your lungs.
4. Imagine breathing IN whatever it is that you need to meet this moment.
5. Imagine breathing OUT anything you don't need to carry forward.

Adapted from: Kelly McGonigal (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lqsq1rjIGQ>)

**Imagine your heart  
expanding with each  
in-breath.**



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