

Breathing to Calm Down

Holding your breath for short periods of time will help to calm the mind and improve your lung capacity and diaphragmatic control. If you've tried any other breathing techniques you may have noticed there's more than just a physical effect. Mentally and emotionally, you feel different too - a sense of calmness and clarity.

To Prepare

Before you start the exercise blow your nose and sit in a position that you can stay in comfortably for five minutes. Use a chair, or the edge of your bed with your feet flat on the floor. If sitting crossed legged use your pillow doubled up as a cushion underneath your bottom. Sit up straight with head and neck in line, but be relaxed.

Use the thumb and ring finger of your right hand to switch the breathing from left to right side. Fold your index and middle finger into the palm of your hand, and use the pad of your thumb to press gently into the right side of the nose and your ring finger to press gently into the left side. If it feels uncomfortable to bend the first two fingers down, rest them on the space between your eyebrows.



Alternate Nostril Breathing

- To begin, sigh three times: breathe in through the nose, then gently sigh out through the mouth, making a HAAA sound.
- Breathe IN through the LEFT nostril, breathe OUT through the RIGHT nostril. Breathe IN through the RIGHT nostril and OUT through the LEFT. This completes ONE round. Repeat two more times.
- As you do this, you may like to count the in and out breath, using an equal count for both parts of the breath. Start by counting to four as you breathe in each time, and counting to four each time you breathe out.

If you're new to this exercise stick with this method for a week or so before trying the next stage of holding your breath. Don't rush: practise three sets of three rounds every day for a week.

Holding Your Breath

- Press your right nostril closed with your thumb. Breathe in gently and steadily through the left side for a count of four.
- Press the left side of the nose closed and hold the breath for a count of two.
- Release and breathe out through the right side, slowly and evenly for

a count of four.

- Now breathe in through the right nostril for a count of four, gently close the right nostril and hold the breath for a count of two.
- Open the left nostril and breathe out through the left side for a count of four. This completes one round.
- Do four more rounds, then sit and breathe normally for about a minute. Notice how you feel. If you feel calm and relaxed try two more sets of five rounds with a rest in between.

Technique

Aim for a soft and steady flow of breath which feels relaxed, not strained.

Don't outstay your welcome by holding the breath for longer than feels comfortable. You should have a reserve of air left in your lungs. If you need to draw in lots of air quickly or you're releasing the out breath like a dam bursting, it's a sign that you're doing too much too quickly. Step back a stage and keep it comfy and controlled.

Progression

With regular practice over a number of weeks you can gradually increase the time you hold the breath by one until all stages are equal and comfortable (e.g. four in, four hold, four out).

If you have high or low blood pressure, a heart condition, are pregnant or have glaucoma, don't hold your breath. Instead, practise the first part only. Be patient. Honour your body. Don't practise breathing or stretching after a heavy meal.

