



Handout 2: Breathing Exercises

Breath Counting

Breath Counting is a simple way to pay attention to your breath by counting each exhale up to five. If you find your mind has wandered and you have counted past five, start again at one. Start with a few minutes, working up to ten minutes.

1. Sit up tall in a comfortable position. Gently close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Then breathe naturally, without trying to breathe deeply.
2. As you breathe naturally, count “one” to yourself as you exhale.
3. The next time you exhale, count “two” and so forth up to “five.”
4. Begin a new cycle by starting at “one” on the next exhalation.

Equal Breathing

Equal Breathing can help calm the nervous system and reduce stress. Repeat the breath for several minutes.

1. Close your eyes and notice the rhythm of your natural breath. Inhale and exhale about five times.
2. Begin to inhale through the nose, slowly counting to four. Exhale through the nose for a slow count of four.
3. Repeat for several minutes, paying attention to matching the length of your inhale and exhale.
4. With practice, increase the length of breaths from four seconds up to six to eight seconds.

Bellows Breath

This is a noisy breathing exercise! Put more emphasis on the exhale than inhale for Bellows Breath. Your inhales and exhales should be equal in duration, but as short as possible.

1. Exhale deeply and sharply through your nose, keeping your mouth closed. Feel your diaphragm muscle pull in your navel.
2. Inhale smoothly and exhale rapidly through your nose. Exhale out with sharp movements of your diaphragm.
3. Shoot for three inhale/exhale cycles per second. Breathe normally after each cycle.
4. On your first try, don't do more than 15 seconds total. As you practice Bellows Breath work up to one minute.

Alternate Nostril Breathing

Alternate nostril breathing can help clear your mind by stimulating both the right and left sides of the brain. Breathing through your left nostril stimulates the right side of the brain which is your "feeling" side. Breathing through your right nostril stimulates the left side of the brain which is your "thinking" side. Alternating your breath between both sides for one to three minutes can calm your mind and improve your mental focus.

Use the index finger and thumb of your right hand for this exercise.

1. Stand or sit up tall.
2. Press your index finger over your left nostril.
3. Slowly inhale through your right nostril.
4. Before you exhale, press your thumb over your right nostril and release your index finger from your left nostril.
5. Slowly exhale through your left nostril.
6. Repeat, starting on the opposite side by inhaling through the left nostril.