

Mind-Body Self Care Practices

PACED BREATHING

By Rebecca McLean & Dr. Roger Jahnke

PACED Breathing or Lengthening the Breath

Research has shown the average person takes about 16 -20 breaths per minute. Normal breathing only uses a small portion of our lungs. Longer, deeper breaths use a much greater portion of our natural lung capacity.

Taking slower, deeper breaths takes the body out of the sympathetic nervous system which is the "GO or Stress" mode, and into parasympathetic nervous system, which is the "REST and Restore" Mode.

Experiment by trying this Paced Breathing practice:

1. Without regulating your breath, time yourself for one minute; and count how many breaths you take- on average this should be somewhere between 15-20 breaths per minute.

NOTE: this step is not necessary –you can just go directly to step 2.

2. **Begin to take deeper and longer breaths:**

- First exhale as fully and deeply as you can-then inhale as slowly and fully as you comfortably can
- Next exhale a little longer this time-and deepen your inhalation as well
- Repeat this step, while trying to lengthen the exhale and inhale
- Try experimenting with this until you see how to take longer and fuller breaths.

3. **Now time yourself and count your breaths for one minute**

The goal is to continually lengthen the breath over a period of 2 to 3 minutes.

The ultimate goal, if possible without any stress, is to take only 5- 6 breaths per minute.

NOTE: Try to stay around 5-7 breaths per minute, as *less than 5 breaths may put your body into another kind of physiological stress*

A powerful "5 for 5" rejuvenating practice:

For 5 minutes take 5-6 deep breaths per minute. If you do not have 5 minutes, even 2 minutes can shift your nervous system out of the "stress mode" and into a healing and "restorative" state.

Paced breathing is highly beneficial for anyone...

- having trouble going to sleep. Supports sleep, and at minimum allows a person's body and mind to go into "rest and restore" instead of the "stress and expend" energy mode.
- who is feeling anxious, overwhelmed, worried, upset, stressed, or wired
- who is tired, fatigued, has foggy thinking, sluggish - who needs more body and brain energy
- who wants greater immune function
- who wants support to have a successful surgery or medical treatment
- who wants faster recovery
- who needs support in breaking an addiction
- who is wants to heal from a trauma or an injury

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PACED BREATHING- *and other variations of breath practice*

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The Physiology

Slower, deeper breathing, activates what is known as the “Relaxation Response.”

1. Longer exhalation causes relaxation.
2. Deeper, fuller breaths cause the lung tissues to expand and the stretch receptors to release a relaxing neurotransmitter.
3. When the relaxation response is activated, the blood vessels enlarge allowing more oxygen and nutrients to be transferred from the blood to the tissues.
4. Relaxation creates a wide array of neurotransmitters to be released, which enhances healing, turns on the immune system, and releases endorphins which are the body's natural pain killers, and the body's “feel good” molecules.
5. Relaxation releases choline based neurotransmitters, which create the rest state and are the opposite of the adrenaline based neurotransmitters, which are the stress hormones. Shallow or short breathing is associated with the adrenaline, which neutralizes the choline neurotransmitters.

Research has proven that over 80% of all disease is due to stress, because when the adrenaline is activated, the immune system is suppressed.

Deeper, fuller breathing provides our body with more life force energy, more optimal immune function and stress resilience. Paced or slower breathing also supports greater brain function, better mood, hormone balance, and the overall feeling of wellbeing. We have the power to activate our immune system, mobilize our body's natural healing resources, turn on our natural powers to thrive - simply by taking regularly taking deep full breaths throughout your day.

***Another highly effective and easier to do breath practice:**

8 Count Breathing

Deepening your breath... Pausing on the Inhalation

The breath is the most powerful tool for gathering life-force energy and mobilizes the body's healing and revitalizing resources. Plus it is the easiest to practice. Do the breath practice below, repeating eight times.

- Inhale slowly through your nose, and hold your breath for a count of one, one thousand; two, one thousand; three, one thousand. Allow your breaths to be deep, slow and relaxed, but not urgent.
- Let your exhalation be slow and long, relaxing your body even more with each exhalation.