

# Breathing Techniques for Anxiety & Stress

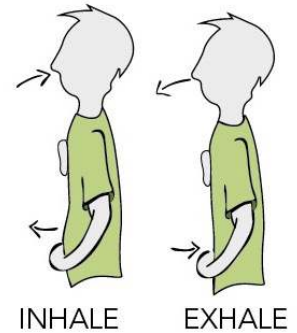
Here are some breathing techniques to turn to for general anxiety and stress, as well as activated or panicked moments. I recommend taking a few minutes every day to stop and just focus on breathing. Try out a few different techniques. Practicing these every day when you're relaxed will make it easier to turn to them when needed during more stressful situations.

## Belly Breathing

*Level: Beginner*

For all of the techniques I'm going to share, I recommend a seated position and belly breathing—which means if you put your hands on your stomach and breathe in, allow your tummy to push out until your lungs are filled.

On your exhalation, draw your stomach and diaphragm in. You should feel your stomach push out on the inhale, and back in on the exhale.



## Equal Breathing

*Level: Beginner*

- Find a comfortable seated position on the floor (or a chair is also fine).
- Start to inhale and exhale on a count of 4 through your nose—breathe in for 4 counts, breathe out for 4 counts.
- Repeat for 10-15 breaths.

There's no hold at the top or bottom of the breath, just try to keep a continuous, slow, and calm cycle going. If you feel comfortable, you could also do equal counts of 6 or 8, but start with 4 to get used to the rhythm and movement.

*This technique helps to balance oxygen and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) levels, calm the nervous system, and redirect focus. It's also a great one to help you fall asleep!*

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# Breathing Techniques (continued)

## 2:1 Breathing

*Level: Intermediate*

This one is easy too, but requires a little more focus. 2:1 means the ratio of breathing is 2 counts out, 1 count in. This one is especially good for when you are in the middle of a panic, or a stressful situation.

- *Sit comfortably and start to breathe normally through your nose. Become aware of your inhales and exhales. (Most people will naturally have a longer inhale and shorter exhale at first.)*
- *Gradually begin to adjust your breathing so your exhale becomes equal to, and then longer than your inhale.*
- *First, get into the rhythm of 2 counts breathing in, and 4 counts breathing out.*
- *Once you get the hang of it, try 3 in, and 6 out. (That's my personal preference for this exercise—some people prefer 6 and 12.)*
- *The important thing is to make sure you aren't taking so long to exhale that you're gasping on the next inhale. Keep the inhale big enough and the exhale short enough to flow from inhale, to exhale, and back to inhale without it being stressful on your body.*

Everyone's capacity is different and there's no right or wrong for the timing on your inhales and exhales, but try to keep it a ratio of 2:1, exhale to inhale.

***Try it: During a stressful situation, or during a meditation to find focus.***

Your breaths become strong and steady, and you'll likely only need 2-4 breaths to go from an activated mode to feeling more relaxed and in control. I also like to do this specific technique before meditating, or during stretches after exercise or yoga. Some people even use this technique AS a meditation for 5-10 minutes—just set the timer and breathe, 2:1, keeping your breaths long and controlled.

*Studies have actually shown that regular practice of this breathing technique can help bring down heart rate and blood pressure.*

## 4-7-8 Breathing (or Inhale-Hold-Exhale Deep Breathing, or Relaxing Breath)

*Level: Advanced*

These are slow and controlled breaths that are naturally calming, but unlike the previous two techniques where they're continuously transitioning inhale to exhale, we're adding a hold at the top. This is a more advanced technique to master, but the 3-stage pattern is very simple:

- *Inhale through your nose for 4 beats.*
- *Hold the breath at the top for 7 beats.*
- *Exhale through your mouth for 8 beats.*
- *Continue for 4 to 10 cycles. Each cycle will take a while so be patient.*

Take your time with these and go slow. Again, you don't want to be gasping for air, so find a length that works comfortably for your body. You might feel a little light-headed the first time you try it, as you do have to find the right rhythm for your body.

***Try it: During a panic or anxiety attack.***

This one takes practice, and it's a great one for when you're really in the thick of a panic attack to help regulate your breath. But because it takes time to master, I recommend practicing it regularly when you're more relaxed. I also like to start meditation practices with a few cycles of 4-7-8 breathing.

*The holding of the breath helps to balance your CO<sub>2</sub> levels, which are often depleted in a state of anxiety or panic.*



# Breathing Techniques (continued)

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation Technique

*Level: Beginner*

This technique will help you to relax, as well as reduce anxiety.

*\*\*Set aside about 15 minutes to complete the entire sequence.*

- *Sit comfortably and relaxed, or I prefer to do this one lying down.*
- *Close your eyes. Bring your attention to your toes. Breathe in through your nose and tense the muscles in your toes, hold the breath for 5 counts, and then release the breath and relax the muscles in your toes.*
- *Continue up through your body—toes to head—taking slow, deep breaths as you tense, hold, and then relax each muscle group along the way; toes, feet, knees, thighs, glutes, abdominals, chest, arms, hands, shoulders, neck, jaw, eyes, forehead, etc. Don't worry about having a checklist of muscle groups, just move along naturally through the body.*
- *Notice the difference between how a muscle feels before and after tensing and relaxing it.*
- *If holding the breath makes you dizzy, reduce the hold to 1-2 counts and work up to holding for longer.*
- *Take your time going through this technique. It becomes a meditation, and you may even fall asleep along the way!*

### **Try it: Before bed!**

Practicing this technique regularly—before bed or otherwise—will help you learn to relax your muscles during tense and stressful situations when we don't necessarily realize we're tensing them!

*Progressive relaxation helps to tame the tension in your body, and refocus your energy.*

