

Breathing Methods

This is a compilation of different breathing techniques and methods. Be advised that before you do any of these techniques, it is prerogative that you know what you are doing. This is not medical advice. Like any exercise or training, be informed first and learn the basics. I personally used the Tummo method a.k.a. The Wim Hoff Method during which I experienced a heavy dry cough, itchy throat, and almost, a fever.

Note: "Breathe" by James Nestor is required reading. Most of the techniques were discussed in the book. (<https://www.mrjamesnestor.com/breath>)

(1) ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING

a.k.a. (NADI SHODHANA)"

(Optional) Hand Positioning: Place the thumb of your right hand gently over your right nostril and the ring finger of that same hand on the left nostril. The forefinger and middle finger should rest between the eyebrows.

Close the right nostril with the thumb and inhale through the left nostril very slowly.

At the top of the breath, pause briefly, holding both nostrils closed, then lift just the thumb to exhale through the right nostril.

At the natural conclusion of the exhale, hold both nostrils closed for a moment, then inhale through the right nostril. Continue alternating breaths through the nostrils for five to ten cycles.

(2) BREATHING COORDINATION

This technique helps to engage more movement from the diaphragm and increases respiratory efficiency. It should never be forced; each breath should feel soft and enriching.

Sit up so that the spine is straight and the chin is perpendicular to the body.

Take a gentle breath in through the nose. At the top of the breath begin counting softly aloud from one to 10 over and over (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10).

As you reach the natural conclusion of the exhale, keep counting but do so in a whisper, letting the voice softly trail out. Then keep going until only the lips are moving and the lungs feel completely empty.

Take in another large and soft breath and repeat.

Continue for anywhere from 10 to 30 or more cycles.

(3) RESONANT (COHERENT) BREATHING

A calming practice that places the heart, lungs, and circulation into a state of coherence, where the systems of the body are working at peak efficiency. There is no more essential technique, and none more basic.

Sit up straight, relax the shoulders and belly, and exhale.

Inhale softly for 5.5 seconds, expanding the belly as air fills the bottom of the lungs.

Without pausing, exhale softly for 5.5 seconds, bringing the belly in as the lungs empty. Each breath should feel like a circle.

Repeat at least ten times, more if possible.

Several apps offer timers and visual guides. My favorites are Paced Breathing and My Cardiac Coherence, both of which are free. I try to practice

this technique as often as possible.

(4) BUTEYKO BREATHING

The point of Buteyko techniques is to train the body to breathe in line with its metabolic needs. For the vast majority of us, that means breathing less. Buteyko had an arsenal of methods, and almost all of them are based on extending the time between inhalations and exhalations, or breath-holding.

Here are a few of the simplest.

Control Pause

A diagnostic tool to gauge general respiratory health and breathing progress.

- Place a watch with a second hand or mobile phone with a stopwatch close by.
- Sit up with a straight back.
- Pinch both nostrils closed with the thumb and forefinger of either hand, then exhale softly out your mouth to the natural conclusion.
- Start the stopwatch and hold your breath.
- When you feel the first potent desire to breathe, note the time and take a soft inhale.

It's important that the first breath in after the Control Pause is controlled and relaxed; if it's labored or gasping, the breath-hold was too long. Wait several minutes and try it again. The Control Pause should only be measured when you're relaxed and breathing normally, never after strenuous exercise or during stressed states. And like all breath restriction techniques, never attempt it while driving, while underwater, or in any other conditions where you might be injured should you become dizzy.

Mini Breathholds

A key component to Buteyko breathing is to practice breathing less all the time, which is what this technique trains the body to do. Thousands of Buteyko practitioners, and several medical researchers, swear by it to stave off asthma and anxiety attacks.

- Exhale gently and hold your breath for half the time of the Control Pause. (For instance, if the Control Pause is 40 seconds, the Mini Breathhold would be 20.)
- Repeat from 100 to 500 times a day.

Setting up timers throughout the day, every 15 minutes or so, can be helpful reminders.

Nose Songs

Nitric oxide is a powerhouse molecule that widens capillaries, increases oxygenation, and relaxes the smooth muscles. Humming increases the release of nitric oxide in the nasal passages 15-fold. There is the most effective, and simple method for increasing this essential gas.

- Breathe normally through the nose and hum, any song or sound.
- Practice for at least five minutes a day, more if possible.

It may sound ridiculous, and feel ridiculous, and annoy those nearby, but the effects can be potent.

Walking/Running

Less extreme hypoventilation exercises (other than the misery I experienced jogging in Golden Gate Park) offer many of the benefits of high-altitude training. They are easy and can be practiced anywhere.

- Walk or run for a minute or so while breathing normally “through the nose.
- Exhale and pinch the nose closed while keeping the same pace.
- When you sense a palpable air hunger, release the nose and breathe very gently, at about half of what feels normal for about 10 to 15 seconds.

- Return to regular breathing for 30 seconds.
- Repeat for about ten cycles.

Decongest the Nose

- Sit up straight and exhale a soft breath, then pinch both nostrils shut.
- Try to keep your mind off the breath-holding; shake your head up and down or side to side; go for a quick walk, or jump and run.
- Once you feel a very potent sense of air hunger, take a very slow and controlled breath in through the nose. (If the nose is still congested, breath softly through the mouth with pursed lips.)
- Continue this calm, controlled breathing for at least 30 seconds to 1 minute.
- Repeat all these steps six times.

Personalized instruction in Buteyko's method is available through www.consciousbreathing.com, www.breathingcenter.com, www.buteykoclinic.com, and with other certified Buteyko instructors.

TUMMO

There are two forms of Tummo:

- one that stimulates the sympathetic nervous system, and
- another which triggers a parasympathetic response.

Both work, but the former, made popular by Wim Hof, is much more accessible.

It's worth mentioning again that this technique should never be practiced near water, or while driving or walking, or in any other circumstances where you might get hurt should you pass out. Consult your doctor if you are pregnant or have a heart condition.

- Find a quiet place and lie flat on your back with a pillow under the head. Relax the shoulders, chest, legs.
- Take 30 very deep, very fast breaths into the pit of the stomach and let it back out. If possible, breathe through the nose; if the nose feels obstructed, try pursed lips. The movement of each inhalation should look like a wave, filling up in the stomach and softly moving up through the lungs. Exhales follow the same movement, first emptying the stomach then the chest as air pours through the nose or pursed lips of the mouth.
- At the end of 30 breaths, exhale to the “natural conclusion,” leaving about a quarter of the air in the lungs. Hold that breath for as long as possible.
- Once you’ve reached your absolute breath-hold limit, take one huge inhale and hold it another 15 seconds. Very gently, move that fresh breath around the chest and to the shoulders, then exhale and start the heavy breathing again.
- Repeat the entire pattern at least three times.

SUDARSHAN KRIYA

This is the most powerful technique James Nestor learned, and one of the most involved and difficult to get through. Sudarshan Kriya consists of four phases: Om chants, breath restriction, paced breathing (inhaling for 4 seconds, holding for 4 seconds, exhaling for 6, then holding for 2), and, finally, 40 minutes of very heavy breathing. A few YouTube tutorials are available, but to get the motions correct, deeper instruction is highly recommended.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4S_4jX0ERA

Box Breathing

Navy SEALs use this technique to stay calm and focused in tense situations. It’s simple.

Inhale to a count of 4; hold 4; exhale 4; hold 4. Repeat.

Longer exhalations will elicit a stronger parasympathetic response. A variation of Box Breathing to more deeply relax the body that's especially effective before sleeping is as follows:

Inhale to a count of 4; hold 4; exhale 6; hold 2. Repeat.

Try at least six rounds, more if necessary.

4-7-8 Breathing

This technique, made famous by Dr. Andrew Weil, places the body into a state of deep relaxation. James Nestor used this on his long flights to help fall asleep.

- Take a breath in, then exhale through your mouth with a whoosh sound.
- Close the mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
- Hold for a count of seven.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, with a whoosh, to the count of eight.
- Repeat this cycle for at least four breaths.

Weil offers a step-by-step instructional on YouTube, which has been viewed more than four million times. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gz4G31LGyog>