



Ultiself's Definitive Guide to Breathing for Success



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4 best breathing exercises to be calm, focused, and successful

Breathing is gaining popularity

Breathing exercises have gained tremendous popularity in the biohacking and self development communities. It is also used in psychology to treat depression and anxiety. Apple has also recognized its value and now teaches conscious breathing in the Breathe app. No wonder that one of the main methods the Buddha taught was breath awareness!

In terms of mental focus and calmness, breathing exercises can have similar or even better effects than meditation. In traditional yoga, breath control or pranayama is even considered necessary for proper meditation! The great Eastern yogis say that we cannot experience our ultimate self without first controlling the breath.



So how do you breathe properly for success?



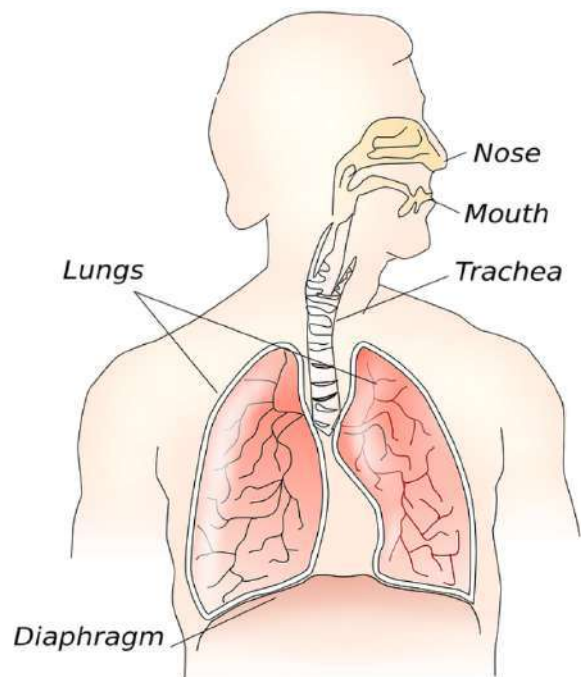
There are many ways to breathe. The breath can be shallow or deep, slow or fast, rhythmic or arrhythmic. You can breathe into the abdomen, thorax, or the clavicles. But what is the best way to breathe?

Actually, there is not one way of breathing that is considered best in all situations. Different situations require different patterns of breathing. This is called functional breathing and is totally logical. Abdominal breathing for instance is considered best for low-performance activities such as office work or watching TV. Thoracic breathing is actually much more efficient when you go for a run or swimming. Why is that?

How does breathing actually work?

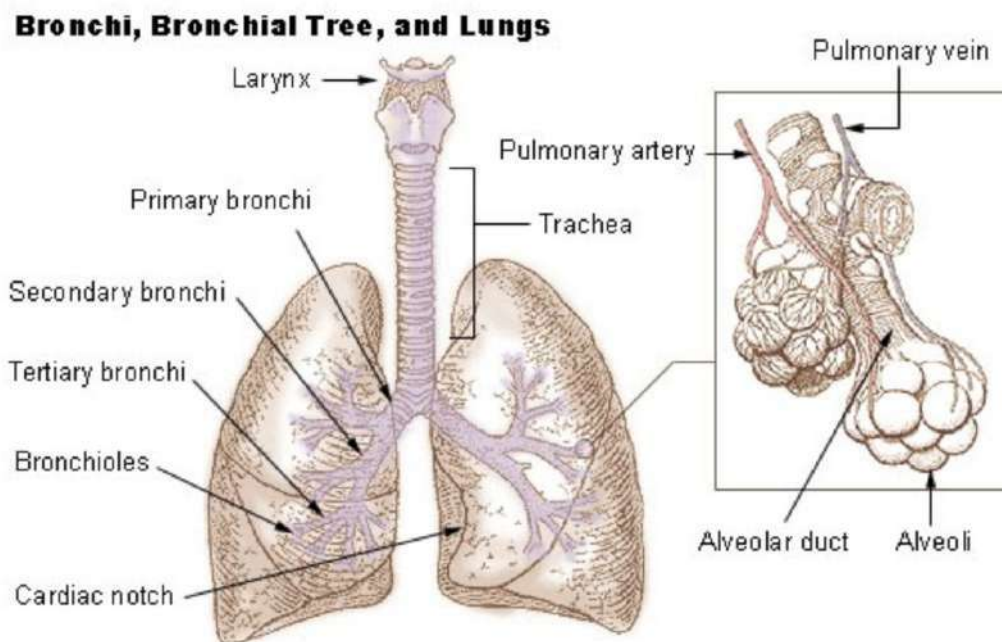
In order to get the gist of proper breathing, let's take a quick look at how the respiratory system actually works:

Proper breathing does not only involve the nose, mouth, and lungs but it also engages many muscles such as the diaphragm. When we breathe in, air enters through the nose or the mouth, travels down the windpipe or trachea, and then enters into the lung through the primary bronchi. You can visualize the inside of the lung like an upside down tree.



Breathing nurtures the tree of life

The primary bronchi are the trunk of the tree and divide into secondary and tertiary bronchi (the branches of the tree) the further they move down the lungs. Finally, the bronchi separate into bronchioles (the individual leaves). On the bronchioles grow the alveoli (the fruit of the tree) where the exchange of oxygen takes place. When breathing in, the alveoli transmit oxygen to the bloodstream and when breathing out, they release waste in the form of carbon dioxide. Because the bronchial system is shaped like an upside-down tree, most alveoli are located in the lower parts of the lungs. Deep and abdominal breathing therefore supplies more oxygen to the bloodstream.



Why is abdominal breathing often advertised as the best way to breathe?

During abdominal breathing our breath rate is naturally slower which has many benefits such as slower heart rate, lower blood pressure and improved heart-rate variability [1]. It is also a great way to improve digestion because the abdominal organs get massaged!

Why abdominal breathing is not always the best

During sports for instance, abdominal breathing can't keep up because it's too slow. Our body just needs a greater supply of oxygen. Naturally, our body will switch to thoracic breathing. Our heart rate increases and the muscles get a greater and faster supply of oxygen.

Optimally, breathing adapts to each and every situation

Considering this, it's quite clear that our body needs to adapt its breathing patterns to the demands of each individual situation. Even better is to have conscious control over our breathing so that we can change its pattern as needed.

The problem is, we are stuck in bad breathing habits

Because breathing happens on its own, we are usually not aware of how we breathe or how our breathing patterns affect the state of our body and mind. Most of us don't even know how to breathe abdominally. Bad habits such as poor posture can block the diaphragm and prevent abdominal breathing.

In order to improve our health, productivity, and focus, it is therefore vital to change our bad breathing habits into healthy ones. We can even learn how to consciously switch between breathing patterns for optimal performance.



Here are a few exercises can help improve your focus, relax, and give you more energy

Box Breathing



How - Box breathing, or the four-square method, is so great that it is even used by the NAVY SEALs. It was popularized by Mark Divine, a former NAVY SEAL, in his Sealfit program. The method is fairly simple. Start by exhaling slowly and completely. Then inhale slowly for a count of 4 and retain the breath for a count of 4. Exhale for a count of 4 and again retain the breath for a count of 4. Repeat this 5 times or more.

Benefits - By regularly practicing box breathing you will not only see your lung volume increase and notice how your breath becomes slower and more rhythmic. You will also become more relaxed and manage stress more easily.

Notes - A slower breath rate and improved oxygen intake has many other health benefits such as slower heart rate, reduced blood pressure and improved heart rate variability [1].

IMST Breathing



How - Inspiratory Muscle Strength Training, is a method to optimize the performance of all the muscles involved in respiration. It only takes 5 minutes and has ample support of scientific studies!

The best way to learn IMST is to use a specialized training device. These are devices that modulate the resistance during your inbreath so that your breathing muscles get gradually strengthened. **We recommend using POWERbreathe® devices because they have been used and validated by independent studies.** Therefore, they are sure to be safe and effective.

Benefits - Like all breathing techniques, this technique may also help you cope with stressful situations. It also may reduce blood pressure and improve cardiovascular function [2], increase sports performance [3], and help with stroke-recovery [4].

IMST Breathing



How - In order to learn [alternate nostril breathing](#), refer to our How-To-Guide in the [habit directory](#). There you can find detailed instructions as well as a good overview over its benefits. Make sure to track your progress and include alternate nostril breathing in your daily routine for best results!

Benefits - This yogic breathing technique helps to balance the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems which are central to our body's stress response and how we recover.

When performed in the morning, this yogic technique can make you more alert and clear-minded. A bit like your usual coffee except that it doesn't make you nervous or jolty. It will actually balance you mentally and emotionally.

Notes - There are numerous studies about the benefits of alternate nostril breathing. A systematic review of these studies confirmed that this technique can not only improve cardiac function, memory and focus. It can even reduce stress and anxiety [5].

Rhythmic Breathing



How - One of the simplest and probably most effective methods for training relaxation and focus is breath counting. It is actually a common method used in the development of meditative concentration.

This is how to do it: Sit upright and become aware of your breath. At the end of an inhalation mentally count: 1. At the end of the next inhalation mentally count: 2. Count up to any number you want. If you lose your count because you were distracted, start anew.

Benefits - The benefits of slow and rhythmic breathing cannot be overstated. The ability to slow down and harmonize our breathing not only improves brain function but can also help to manage our emotions and prevent panic attacks [6].

Notes - The benefits of rhythmic breathing have also been recognized by self-development gurus. **Tony Robbins** for instance recommends to do his **Power Breathing Technique** for at least three times a day to improve your health, focus, and productivity
[<https://www.tonyrobbins.com/health-vitality/just-breathe/>]

There are also many other rhythmic breathing techniques such as the 4-7-8 Method which can help you to relax. The technique is quite simple: Inhale slowly while counting up to 4, retain the breath while counting up to 7, and exhale slowly while counting up to 8. Repeat this for at least 5 times or as long as you need to feel more relaxed.

Wim Hof Method









How - Wim Hof has designed a whole 10-weeks training program that can take online through his website. Wim has also written several books explaining his method. His program is based on the three pillars of cold exposure , breathing, and commitment/willpower. For more info checkout <https://www.wimhofmethod.com>

Benefits - Wim Hof is Inventory of an amazing breathing technique that can enable you to withstand extreme situations of cold [7] and to willfully control your body's stress response and immune system [8] [9].

Notes - Wim Hof has repeatedly appeared on international TV stations demonstrating his incredible ability to remain immersed in ice tanks for hours on end while scientists monitor his body temperature. He is not only able to maintain his core body temperature, but scientists also observed that he can wilfully shut down pain circuits in the brain [7].

Create Table Comparing all of them

Here is a table comparing the effective breathing techniques

 Technique	 Device needed?	 Amount of time	 Benefits	 Why it works	 When to do it?
Box Breathing	No	5-10 minutes	Lower blood pressure Increased lung volume Relaxation	Slower and more rhythmic and more efficient breathing	In the morning
IMST	Yes	5 minutes	Lower blood pressure Improved heart function Improved sports performance Helps during stroke recovery	Lower blood pressure Stronger respiratory muscles and increased lung volume	Whenever you have time
Alternate Nostril Breathing	No	5 minutes	Improved heart function, memory, & focus Reduced stress & anxiety	Optimization of the autonomic nervous system	Best in the morning
Rhythmic Breathing	No	5-10 minutes	Improved brain function Better emotion regulation Useful to prevent panic attacks	Harmonizes natural breathing Prevents hyperventilation during panic attacks	Whenever you need it
Wim Hof Method	No	15 minutes	Improved resistance to cold Improved stress response Better immune system	Brain circuits for pain get shut down Benefits of cold exposure Voluntary activation of the sympathetic nervous system	Anytime

Conclusion



Learning how to adapt our breathing to meet the demands of each situation is a vital skill. It can not only improve your body's oxygen intake and help you during sports and other high-performance situations. Science confirms that functional breathing can help you relax, cope with stress, and even prevent panic attacks. Even the great yogis of the East agree that breath control is essential for experiencing your ultimate self!



If you also want to experience your ultimate self, make sure to make proper breathing one of your new habits! Check out the different breathing techniques and our in-house instructions on how to do them in the [HABIT DIRECTORY](#). And don't forget to track your progress by filling the daily questionnaire. **Don't waste your time with techniques that don't work for you!**

Sources

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