

# BREATH WORK



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WORK

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# BREATH

## BREATH WORK



Breathing techniques are powerful tools for emotional regulation because they directly influence the autonomic nervous system (ANS). This is a part of the nervous system which influences our stress and relaxation responses.

The nervous system response in relation to breath also interacts with parts of the midbrain involved in affective processing - this is why breathing practices can be useful to support in emotional regulation.

With practice you will discover what breathing practice you find effective and helpful for different circumstances.

As the expert on your own experience, it is important to 'listen' to your own body. If after trying a breath practice several times you find it is not working for you, try an alternative one or pause and do something else you know supports you to regulate.

If you find a few breath practices that are beneficial, it's helpful to practice them regularly – just a few minutes a day. This way, when you 'need them' - in moments of heightened stress for example, you will be more readily able to draw upon them as a resource to support you.

# INTENTIONAL BREATH

**Some breathwork practices lower arousal, while others will bring more energy in!**

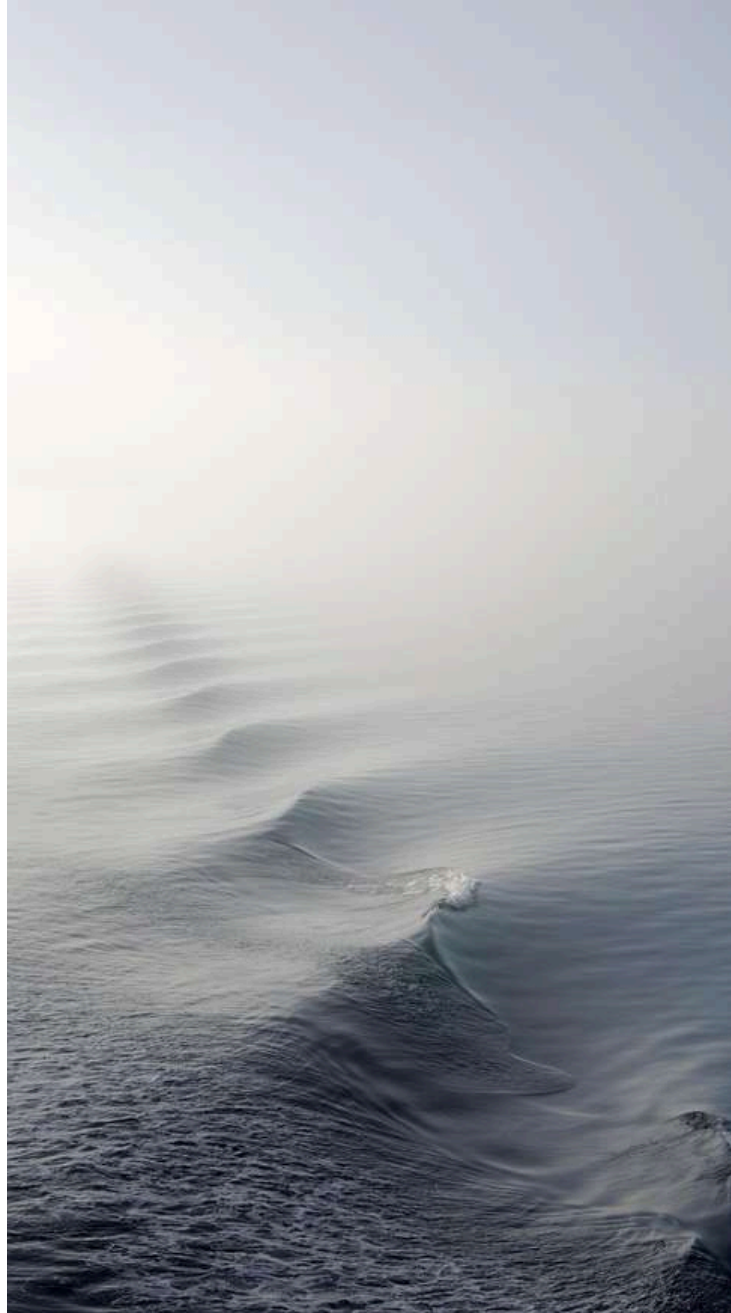
Breathwork is an important part of many wisdom traditions. In yoga for example, different types of breath practices are used to support with balancing the nervous system.

In essence, the breath can help to shift the nervous system from "Fight & Flight" to "Rest and Digest", alternatively we can bring more vitality and energy into the system where we have fallen into passive defence states.

When we are in a stressed, anxious or panicky - more 'hyper' aroused state, we can use some specific breathing techniques to help 'down' regulate - to bring more calmness in.

It is not a good idea to use these breathing techniques if you are feeling in a 'hypo' aroused state – like when you are feeling drowsy, tired or very low energy or 'flat' as they might deepen or prolong that state.

Instead, you could try to use the breathing techniques that are aimed at bringing more energy into your system.



- **Activated State**

- Long, slow exhalations
- Stimulates parasympathetic nervous system
- Reduces heart rate, lowers blood pressure
- Produces sense of calm

- **De-activated State**

- Faster, more rapid inhalations
- Stimulates sympathetic nervous system
- Elevates heart rate and blood pressure
- Brings more energy in.

# WELLBEING BENEFITS

## PREFRONTAL CORTEX (PFC)

- The PFC is important to emotional regulation and executive control.
- Breathing mindfully helps activate the PFC, which in turn helps dampen overactivity in parts of the brain that are involved with emotional reactivity.
- This improves decision-making, impulse control, and emotional balance.

## HEART RATE VARIABILITY (HRV)

- HRV is a key marker of emotional and physiological resilience.
- Controlled breathing, especially coherent breathing (e.g., 5-6 breaths per minute), improves HRV.
- Higher HRV = greater ability to adapt to stress and return to baseline after emotional arousal.

# WELLBEING BENEFITS

## Interrupting Rumination & Emotional Loops

- Intentional breathing can temporarily break the cycle of anxious or depressive thought patterns by drawing attention away from mental loops and into the body.
- Engages the default mode network less (involved in rumination).

## Develops Interoceptive Awareness

- Breathwork practice over time can increase interoception—the ability to sense internal bodily states.
- Interoceptive awareness helps improve emotional self-awareness. We learn to recognize emotional states earlier giving more opportunity to respond to what is arising rather than get caught up in reactivity.

## Discharging Excess Arousal

- Trauma and chronic stress can lead to the nervous system becoming sensitised and lead to more chronic states of over-activation or (under) de-activation.
- Techniques like paced breathing, sighing, or vagal toning help the body release stored tension.
- In trauma therapy (e.g., Somatic Experiencing, DBR), breath can be used to support regulating arousal safely.

## Re-establishes Sense of Agency

- In moments of emotional overwhelm, intentional breathwork offers a simple, accessible tool to regain control.
- This can be particularly empowering for those with anxiety, PTSD, or dissociation.



# TIPS FOR PRACTICE

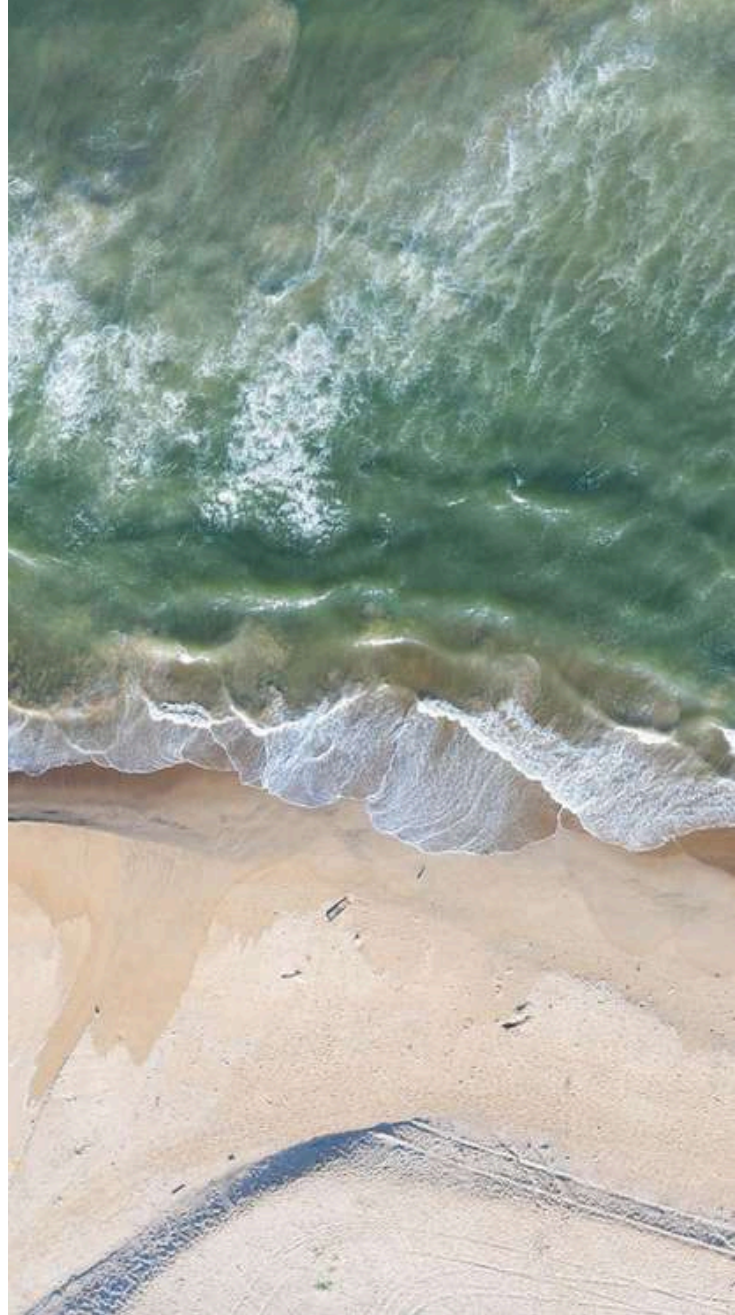
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- For a longer more focused practice, find a quiet space
- Sit or lie down comfortably
- Focus on the sensation of the breath
- Pair breathwork with other grounding strategies (e.g., awareness of feet on floor, hands on chest/belly, weighted blankets)
- Practice daily to build emotional resilience over time
- Set a timer to practice regularly – or use ‘cues’ (e.g. when you make a drink, use the bathroom, answer the phone) to do some short breathwork practices
- Listen to your own body! If the practice you are using is not helpful at that time - try a different one or pause and do something else that you know supports you to regulate

# INTENTIONAL BREATH

Some breathwork practices lower arousal, while others will bring more energy in!

- **Double Intake Breath**
  - Balances nervous system & enhances calm & focus
  - Breath in to normal capacity, take another sip, long exhale
  - 2 - 5 mins
- **Sigh Breath**
  - Releases emotional tension
  - Inhale deeply → Audible sigh on exhale (letting go)
  - 3 - 5 breaths
- **Diaphragmatic Breath**
  - Grounds and soothes, reduces tension
  - Inhale through nose → Feel belly expand → Exhale slowly
- **Alternate Nostril Breath (Nadi Shodhana)**
  - Balances brain hemispheres
  - Use thumb & finger to alternate nostrils: Inhale left, exhale right, then reverse
- **Cooling Breath (Sitali Pranayama)**
  - Calm the mind, assist focus, calm 'hot' emotions, and cool the body
  - Inhale through curled tongue - close mouth and exhale through the nose (8-12 rounds)



- **Box Breath**
  - Enhances calm & focus
  - Inhale 4s → Hold 4s → Exhale 4s → Hold 4s
- **4 - 6 Breath**
  - Faster, more rapid inhalations
  - Stimulates PNS - calming
  - Inhale 4s → Exhale 6s (longer exhale calms)
- **Coherent Breath**
  - Balances nervous system & HRV
  - Inhale & Exhale slowly - in regular rhythm - (5 - 6 breaths per minute)

# ELEMENT BREATHS

## EARTH BREATHING

- Inhale and exhale through nose
- as you inhale, draw magnetic energy from the earth up through soles of feet, through the body and out through the crown of the head
- as you exhale, draw white light from above through the crown and the body down into the earth


## FIRE BREATHING

- Inhale through mouth, exhale through nose
- Inhale and gather all the fiery energy in your body into the solar plexus - hold the breath for a moment and bring it from solar plexus to the heart
- Exhale and radiate breath from the heart as pure light - directing it above, below, to the front, to the back and to both sides

## ETHER BREATHING

- Having no visual element, just a very subtle sense of - in and out - through the nose and mouth together





# ELEMENT BREATHS

## AIR BREATHING

- Breath in and out through mouth (a very fine subtle breath)
- As you inhale, gather all your thoughts to the point between your eyebrows
- As you exhale, blow them out through this point like autumn leaves scattering on the wind

## WATER BREATHING

- Inhale through nose, exhale through mouth
- As you inhale and exhale, imagine a rainwater shower of water so soft it's like light, flowing through the crown of the body and over the body.
- Releasing through the palms of the hands, soles of the feet and tailbone, washing away darkness, tiredness, tension, anything you don't want to be carrying, washing away into the earth

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LET'S GET IN TOUCH

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