

THE HOLISTIC CARE · FREE GUIDE

# Breathwork Guide

## *8 Techniques for Stress, Sleep, Focus & Energy*

Simple breathing practices used by athletes, therapists,  
and mindfulness teachers worldwide



INCLUDES SCIENCE NOTES · STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS · TIMING GUIDES

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# The Power of Breath

Breath is the only function of the autonomic nervous system that is both automatic and under voluntary control. That is not a small thing. It means that in any moment of stress, anxiety, or chaos, you have a direct lever to your nervous system — right under your nose, always available, completely free.

The eight techniques in this guide draw from ancient yogic tradition, modern neuroscience, sports psychology, and clinical therapy. Together, they cover the full spectrum of what breathwork can do — from activating energy to inducing deep sleep.

## QUICK REFERENCE

#	Technique	Best For	Time
1	Box Breathing	Stress	4+
2	4-7-8 Breathing	Sleep	3+
3	Alternate Nostril	Balance	5+
4	Coherent Breathing	Heart health	10+
5	Belly Breathing	Anxiety	5+
6	Energising Breath	Energy	3+
7	Ocean Breath	Yoga practice	Throughout yoga / 10 min s
8	Extended Exhale	Evening	5+

# 1

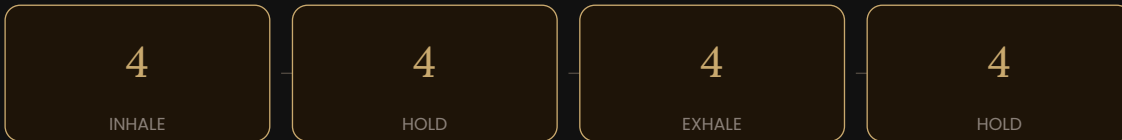
## Box Breathing

4–8 min

(Sama Vritti)

Stress · Focus · Calm

### BREATHING PATTERN



### OVERVIEW

The military's secret weapon for stress regulation. Used by Navy SEALs, surgeons, and Olympic athletes before high-stakes moments. Equal counts in all four phases create a rhythmic coherence that rapidly calms the autonomic nervous system.

### STEP-BY-STEP

Breathe in through your nose for 4 counts. Hold at the top for 4. Exhale through your nose for 4. Hold at the bottom for 4. Repeat 4–8 cycles.

### THE SCIENCE

Box breathing directly activates the parasympathetic nervous system within 60–90 seconds, reducing cortisol and increasing heart rate variability — a key marker of resilience.

# 2

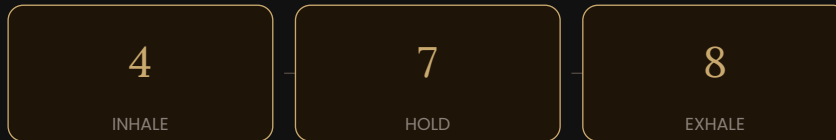
## 4-7-8 Breathing

3-5 min

(Dr Andrew Weil's Method)

Sleep · Anxiety · Racing thoughts

### BREATHING PATTERN



### OVERVIEW

Described as a "natural tranquilliser for the nervous system," this technique uses an extended exhale to activate the vagus nerve. The 7-count hold builds CO2 tolerance and the long exhale triggers deep relaxation.

### STEP-BY-STEP

Exhale completely through your mouth. Close your mouth and inhale through your nose for 4 counts. Hold for 7 counts. Exhale completely through your mouth for 8 counts. Repeat 4 cycles.

### THE SCIENCE

The extended exhale stimulates the vagus nerve — the main highway of the parasympathetic nervous system — producing a rapid relaxation response often felt within 2-3 cycles.

# 3

## Alternate Nostril

5-10 min

(Nadi Shodhana)

Balance · Clarity · Before meditation

### BREATHING PATTERN



### OVERVIEW

One of yoga's most revered breathing practices, described in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika. "Nadi" means energy channel; "Shodhana" means purification. It systematically balances the two hemispheres of the brain.

### STEP-BY-STEP

Use your right hand. Close your right nostril with your thumb. Inhale slowly through the left. Close both with ring finger. Hold. Release thumb; exhale through right. Inhale right. Close both. Release ring finger; exhale left. This is one cycle.

### THE SCIENCE

EEG studies show alternate nostril breathing produces measurable synchronisation between the left and right brain hemispheres within 10 minutes, improving cognitive performance and emotional regulation.

# 4

## Coherent Breathing

10–20 min

(Resonant Breathing)

Heart health · Daily calm · Long-term practice

### BREATHING PATTERN



### OVERVIEW

Research by cardiologist Dr Stephen Elliott shows that breathing at exactly 5 breaths per minute (6 seconds in, 6 seconds out) creates resonance between the heart, lungs, and brain — the "sweet spot" of cardiovascular coherence.

### STEP-BY-STEP

Set a soft timer or use a metronome app. Breathe in for exactly 6 seconds. Breathe out for exactly 6 seconds. No pauses. Keep the breath continuous, smooth, and equal. Practice for 10–20 minutes daily.

### THE SCIENCE

Daily coherent breathing for 6 weeks significantly increases heart rate variability (HRV), reduces blood pressure, and improves mood and stress resilience — comparable to antidepressant medication in some studies.

# 5

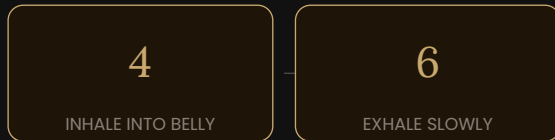
## Belly Breathing

5–10 min

(Diaphragmatic Breathing)

Anxiety · Digestion · Beginners

### BREATHING PATTERN



### OVERVIEW

The most fundamental breathwork practice — and the one most adults have forgotten. Under stress, humans switch to shallow chest breathing. Returning to diaphragmatic breathing is the fastest way to signal safety to the nervous system.

### STEP-BY-STEP

Lie down or sit comfortably. Place one hand on your chest, one on your belly. As you inhale, let only the belly hand rise — keep the chest still. Exhale slowly and completely. Feel the belly fall. Practice this for 10 breaths, 3 times daily.

### THE SCIENCE

Diaphragmatic breathing reduces the inflammatory marker IL-6 by up to 40% and measurably lowers blood pressure, making it one of the most evidence-supported tools in stress medicine.

# 6

## Energising Breath

3-5 min

(Kapalabhati – Skull-Shining Breath)

Energy · Focus · Morning · Congestion

### BREATHING PATTERN



### OVERVIEW

One of the six classical cleansing practices (Shatkarmas) of Hatha yoga. Sharp, rhythmic exhales pump the diaphragm, clear the respiratory tract, oxygenate the blood, and create a natural state of alert, focused energy.

### STEP-BY-STEP

Sit tall. Take a deep breath in. Then exhale sharply through your nose — a short, quick pump from your belly. The inhale happens automatically between pumps. Begin with 1 exhale per second, 30 pumps per round. Rest. Repeat 3 rounds. CAUTION: Not suitable during pregnancy, high blood pressure, or heart conditions.

### THE SCIENCE

Kapalabhati significantly increases oxygen saturation and respiratory muscle strength. Studies show improvements in cognitive function and reduced fatigue within a single 5-minute session.

# 7

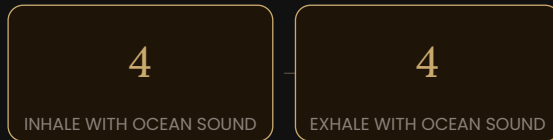
## Ocean Breath

Throughout yoga / 10 min standalone

(Ujjayi – Victorious Breath)

Yoga practice · Focus · Nervous system toning

### BREATHING PATTERN



### OVERVIEW

The breath of yoga's moving meditation. Ujjayi creates a soft, oceanic sound by slightly constricting the glottis (back of the throat). This creates warmth, builds focus, and produces a gentle internal pressure that deepens each breath.

### STEP-BY-STEP

Breathe through your nose only. On the exhale, slightly constrict the back of your throat — as if you're trying to fog a mirror but with your mouth closed. You should hear a soft "ha" or ocean sound. Apply this to both inhale and exhale equally.

### THE SCIENCE

Ujjayi breathing activates the vagus nerve through the gentle pressure in the throat, producing calming effects. In yoga practice, it significantly increases oxygen uptake and body temperature compared to unregulated breathing.



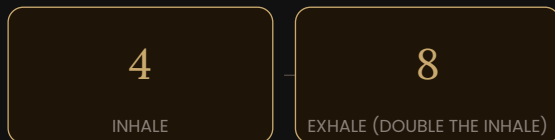
# Extended Exhale

5–10 min

(2:1 Breathing)

Evening · Sleep onset · Acute stress

## BREATHING PATTERN



## OVERVIEW

The simplest and most scientifically direct way to activate the rest-and-digest response. The exhale directly controls the parasympathetic nervous system — double the exhale length and you double the relaxation signal to the brain.

## STEP-BY-STEP

Inhale for 4 counts. Exhale for 8 counts. That's it. You can adjust — inhale 3, exhale 6; or inhale 5, exhale 10. The ratio matters more than the numbers. Practise 10–20 cycles before sleep or after a stressful event.

### THE SCIENCE

Research shows the extended exhale lowers heart rate within 30 seconds and measurably reduces state anxiety scores. It is increasingly used in clinical anxiety treatment as a self-regulation tool with no side effects.