



Foundational Breathing Practice

Simple Breath Patterns to Support Autonomic Regulation

Introduction

Breathing patterns influence autonomic nervous system activity. Slow, controlled breathing may support regulation, reduce physiological stress, and improve overall resilience.

This guide outlines foundational breathing practices that can be used independently or alongside movement and recovery strategies.

Why Breathing Matters

Breath influences:

- Heart rate variability
- Blood pressure
- Muscular tension
- Perceived stress levels
- Recovery capacity

Intentional breathing does not eliminate stress but may help the body transition toward a more regulated state.

Foundational Practice 1: Diaphragmatic Breathing

Position

- Seated upright with feet supported
- Or lying on your back with knees bent
- One hand on chest, one on lower ribs

Pattern

1. Inhale slowly through the nose for 4 seconds.
2. Allow the diaphragm to descend as the lower ribs widen outward and expand circumferentially.
3. The chest may rise slightly, but the primary movement should occur through the lower ribcage rather than the upper shoulders.
4. Exhale gently through the nose or mouth for 4–6 seconds, allowing the ribs to soften and return inward.
5. Repeat for 2–5 minutes.

Breathing should feel smooth and quiet, without forceful expansion or visible shoulder lifting.

Key Focus Points

- Think “rib expansion” rather than simply “push the belly out.”
 - The abdomen may move slightly, but the goal is lower rib expansion.
 - Avoid shrugging the shoulders or lifting the upper chest excessively.
 - Allow the exhale to be passive and unforced.
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Foundational Practice 2: Extended Exhale Breathing

Lengthening the exhale may encourage parasympathetic activity.

Pattern

1. Inhale through the nose for 4 seconds
2. Exhale slowly for 6–8 seconds
3. Pause briefly before the next inhale
4. Repeat for 2–5 minutes

The breath should remain smooth and comfortable.

**If this breath count is too long for your comfort, adjust to your body's capacity. The intention here is the exhale for longer than you inhale.*

When to Use These Practices

Breathing practices may be helpful:

- During periods of heightened stress
- Before sleep
- After exercise
- During recovery routines
- Prior to challenging conversations or tasks

They may also be integrated into mobility or hydrotherapy sessions.

How to Monitor Response

After practicing, consider:

- Has muscle tension decreased?
- Has your heart rate slowed slightly?
- Do you feel more settled?

Mild lightheadedness can occur if breathing becomes too forceful. If so, return to natural breathing.

Practical Tips

- Start with short sessions (2–3 minutes)
 - Maintain nasal breathing when comfortable
 - Avoid forcing deep breaths
 - Practice consistently rather than intensely
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Final Note

Breathing practices are a foundational component of nervous system regulation. Consistency and comfort are more important than precision.

These techniques are general in nature and may be modified based on individual tolerance.

Disclaimer

This material is provided for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for individualized medical or therapeutic advice.