

The Breath - Conscious Breathing by Rebecca Morgan-Jones

Do you know how to breathe? Do you hold your breath? Do you recognise what happens to your breath when you are worried, stressed or anxious? Are you conscious of your breath at all? Do you ever notice that you hold your breath; if so, when?

Do you know how to control your breath to affect your mental and physical state?

I'm sure most of you laughed when you read the first question, "Do you know how to breathe?". Of course, you do, you've been doing it every day since you were born.

True, but when we were children we breathed correctly; we could breathe from the tummy, full, deep breaths. As we get older, our breathing changes, we start to hold our tummy's in as we become self-conscious of letting them go and this affects where we breathe from and to. We also start to shallow breathe more often as life becomes stressful and busy.

We tend to breathe from the chest, using our shoulders and neck. We should breathe from the tummy and ribs. The tummy should expand out and in as we inhale and exhale and the ribs should also expand and contract, the shoulders should not move. Take note of how you breathe as you read this, where are you breathing from and to? What parts of your body move? Does your tummy expand out as you breathe in? Do you hold your breath as you read? I've noticed I can often hold my breath when I'm typing.

Do you breathe in and out of your nose or do you breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth?

Did you know that we breathe about 17,000 times a day, so the more we know about the breath and how to get it to work in our favour, the better?

The breath, when used properly, is our secret weapon and it is totally free. It can help us improve so many aspects of our wellbeing. It can aid and improve our mental and physical state. It can encourage us to be more present, calm, focused, creative and relaxed. It can also improve insomnia, energy, sluggishness, lower blood pressure and boost our immune system. So, the more we know about the breath and how to use it efficiently, the better.

Relaxing lockdown for many of us is a time of worry and adjustment and this can be unsettling - so the more we can adopt these practices to support our wellbeing, the better.

Last month, I talked about gratitude and how we can support our thought process which in turn will support our breathing; this week, I'm going to share some breathing techniques you can adopt to help with the body physically, and to settle the mind. Remember, the two really affect each other, it is a two-way conversation.

If we shallow breathe, this tells the mind something is wrong and this increases adrenaline in the body, which makes us feel more stressed and anxious. But learning to use the breath to break this cycle can have a massive effect on the way we feel, think and function.

Taking breaks just to breathe consciously can refuel us. It can refocus us; it can make us more creative. The next time you have something to write or plan, try stopping and breathing. The more relaxed we are, the more creativity comes to the surface. So, these techniques are important for everyone.

Techniques to try

There are many different types of breaths that we can do for different purposes. We can manipulate and control the breath to make us feel a certain way.

Consciously breathe deeply a few times every day. Just shut your eyes, relax your jaw, shoulder, hands and tongue, and just breathe. Breathe in which ever way makes you feel good. This is beneficial as it resets us and makes us feel calm and energised.

A simple tweak – **nose breathing** is much calmer way to breath than mouth breathing. So, try and consciously breath from the nose if you are feeling worried or stressed. Often, we use the mouth to breathe when we are nervous/anxious. The mouth is great to use to sigh from when we need to release tension. Try breathing through the nose and sighing out of the mouth.

A simple breath you can try is **belly (diaphragmatic) breathing** - this can help us feel calmer, less stressed or less nervous. It is also a great breath for everyone to do throughout the day, as it refuels and calms the body and brain. Try it when working and you need a rest, or you are feeling tired. It is better to breathe for five minutes than to reach for coffee. Just stop, place your hand on your tummy and check if you're breathing into the tummy rather than the chest. Watch the links below to have a go at this technique.

Equal breath is great to do if you need to wind down. So, good to do if you want to sleep or just to calm down when you get in from work. It is also useful to use if you have just experienced a stressful situation and you need help to find some peace.

Alternate Nose Breath is great to do for energy. If you are feeling sluggish first thing in the morning, try this technique. It is useful to do when you're having a mid-afternoon slump or if you are feeling tired before you have a presentation to do. It really livens the brain up. It's a strange one to master, but it really works.

I think it's important to say that you may not like all of the breathing techniques, and some may not have the desired effect. But, try them and take the ones that make you feel how you want to feel.

Remember, everything we need to calm us down, make us feel safe, less anxious, confident, energised, refuelled or rested can be found in the breath.

Can you commit to stopping every so often to consciously breathe?

Author profile: Rebecca has worked in education for nearly 20 years, starting off her career in a Fresh Start school in the city of Nottingham and soon taking over the position of Head of Art at Toot Hill School. Rebecca moved on from middle leadership to join the Associate School Leader team, where she was responsible for delivering training such as middle leadership courses, coordinating programmes including those for trainee teachers, NQTs and RQTs. Currently, Rebecca is a system support leader for Nova Education Trust and member of the Well-Being Working Group. Rebecca is passionate about people and working to supporting them in their career. Making sure teachers are happy and they truly enjoy coming to work is her real driver. This passion led her to train to be a mind-set coach. When she's not working in an educational setting, Rebecca delivers training to various schools, corporate settings and individuals on mind-set and being conscious about the way we think. Rebecca is also a qualified yoga and meditation instructor; she has written and delivered wellness days and high-end yoga retreats.