

CLIENT HANDOUT: BREATHING PACKET

The “I think” which Kant said must be able to accompany all my objects, is the “I breathe” which actually does accompany them.

— William James

Breathing is so simple and so obvious we often take it for granted; ignoring the power it has to affect body, mind, and spirit. As you begin to become mindful of your breathing, you may notice that even at rest your breathing is faster than the “average” rate of 12 to 14 times a minute. Hans Weller queried, “Nearly every physical problem is accompanied by a disturbance of breathing. But which comes first?” Well, the fact is that many of us habitually ‘hyperventilate’; we typically breathe rapidly and shallowly — from the top of our chest only. This kind of breathing sharply reduces the level of carbon dioxide in our blood, causing arteries — including the carotid artery going to the brain — to constrict, thus reducing the flow of blood to the rest of the body. So, unfortunately it doesn’t really matter how much oxygen we breathe into our lungs, because our brain and body inevitably perceive a shortage of oxygen. In turn, this shortage of oxygen activates our sympathetic nervous system’s fight or flight response” — producing tension, anxiety, irritability, and a marked impairment in our ability to process information.

The key to slowing down our breathing is not to try to purposely slow it down, but rather to learn to breathe more deeply, using our diaphragm, belly, rib cage, and lower back in the breathing process. To do belly/abdominal/diaphragmatic breathing properly allow your lungs to fill from the bottom up. On inhalation, the diaphragm and the muscles between your ribs contract and expand the chest cavity, lowering the pressure in the chest cavity. Room air then flows in through the airways (from high pressure to low pressure) and inflates the lungs. On exhalation, the diaphragm and intercostal muscles relax and the size of the thorax decreases. The decrease in volume in the chest increases the pressure in the thorax above the outside air pressure. Air from the lungs (high pressure) then flows out of the airways to the outside air (low pressure). The cycle then repeats with each breath.

When breathing with only the top half of the chest, the top of the lungs open first, and air fills only those top segments. However, if you push your belly out during inhalation, then the diaphragm expands first. The lower ribs then push out and open the lower portions of the lungs first. Air rushes down into the lungs to fill the vacuum, filling the whole lungs-bottom to top. By pulling the belly in at the end of the exhalation, the process is reversed. The breath may be used as the focus of meditation. Since you can only breathe in the present moment an awareness of your breathing automatically puts you into the present moment.

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BREATHING EXERCISES

ABDOMINAL/BELLY/DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

The Technique:

1. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen. When you take a deep breath in, the hand on the abdomen should rise higher than the one on the chest, insuring that the diaphragm is pulling air into the bases of the lungs.
2. After exhaling through the mouth, take a slow deep breath in through your nose. Take in as much air as you comfortably can. Hold it for a count of 7.
3. Slowly exhale through your mouth for a count of 8. As all the air is released with relaxation, gently contract your abdominal muscles to completely evacuate the remaining air from the lungs. It is important to remember that we deepen respirations not by inhaling more air, but through completely exhaling it.
4. Repeat the cycle four more times for a total of 5 deep breaths and try to breathe at a rate of one breath every 10 seconds (or 6 breaths per minute). At this rate our heart rate variability increases, which has a positive effect on cardiac health.
5. In general, exhalation should be twice as long as inhalation. The use of the hands on the chest and abdomen are only needed to help you train your breathing. Once you feel comfortable with your ability to breathe into the abdomen, they are no longer needed.

ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING

With this exercise, we breathe through only one nostril at a time. The logic behind this exercise is that normal breathing does alternate from one nostril to the other at various times during the day. In a healthy person, the breath will alternate between nostrils about every two hours. According to the yogis, when the breath continues to flow in one nostril for more than two hours, as it does with most of us, it will have an adverse effect on our health. If the right nostril is involved, the result is mental and nervous disturbance. If the left nostril is involved, the result is chronic fatigue and reduced brain function. The longer the flow of breath in one nostril, the more serious the illness will be. Benefits: The exercise produces optimum function to both sides of the brain: that is optimum creativity and optimum logical verbal activity. This also creates a more balanced person, since both halves of the brain are functioning properly. The yogis consider this to be the best technique to calm the mind and the nervous system.

The Technique:

1. Close the right nostril with your right thumb and inhale through the left nostril. Do this to the count of four seconds.
2. Immediately close the left nostril with your right ring finger and little finger, and at the same time remove your thumb from the right nostril, and exhale through this nostril. Do this to the count of eight seconds.

This completes a half round.

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3. Inhale through the right nostril to the count of four seconds.
4. Close the right nostril with your right thumb and exhale through the left nostril to the count of eight seconds.

This completes one full round.

5. Start by doing three rounds, adding one per week to seven rounds.

A CENTERING BREATH

The Technique:

1. Begin by breathing slowly and gently all the way down, then pause and wait to breathe in again until your body initiates a breath. This will allow the O₂/CO₂ ratio in your body to rebalance.
2. Wait twenty or thirty seconds or longer before your body needs a breath. Don't wait so long that it feels uncomfortable. Just allow your body to tell you when it needs a breath, then gently let the air in and resume your regular breathing cycle.
3. After a few cycles of regular breathing, do a second Centering Breath.
4. Breathe slowly and gently all the way down, then pause and wait to breathe in again until your body tells you it needs a breath. When your body needs a breath, gently let the air in and resume your regular breathing cycle.
5. After a few cycles of regular breathing, do a third Centering Breath.
6. Breathe slowly and gently all the way down, then suspend the breath and wait to inhale until your body tells you it needs a breath. When your body needs a breath, gently let the air in and resume your regular breathing cycle.

THE "C" BREATH

The Technique:

Sit down with your feet flat on the floor, towards the front of the chair, so that only your pelvis rests on the chair.

1. Rest your hands on your lap.
2. Begin by inhaling and letting your stomach expand with your breath.
3. As your stomach expands slightly, let your pelvis roll forward and your spine extend while you bring your head up.
4. As you exhale, let your head drop down and your pelvis drop back. You'll find that your body makes a natural "C" shape.
5. Repeat the in-breath and the out-breath, allowing your breath to lead the movement.
6. On the inhale, relax the belly-muscles and let your spine flex so that your chin and head tilt up, at the same time rolling forward on your sit-bones.
7. On the exhale, roll back on to your sit-bones and tilt your chin/head down.

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THE STIMULATING BREATH
Andrew Weil, M.D.

The Technique:

1. Inhale and exhale rapidly through your nose, keeping your mouth closed but relaxed. Inhalation and exhalation should be uniform in duration, but as short as possible.
2. Attempt three in-and-out breath cycles per second. This produces a quick movement of the diaphragm, suggesting a bellows.
3. Breathe normally after each cycle.
4. Do not do this for more than 15 seconds on your first try.
5. Each time you practice, you may increase your time by four or five seconds, until you reach a full minute.

THE RELAXING BREATH: 4-7-8 EXERCISE
Andrew Weil, M.D.

This exercise is calmative for the nervous system, activating the parasympathetic branch. Dr. Weil suggests that this be practiced at least twice a day, but do not do more than four breaths at one time for the first month of practice. It is an effective mechanism for combating internal stress and external stressors.

The Technique:

1. Sit in a chair with your back straight.
2. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there throughout the breathing exercise.
3. Purse your lips slightly and exhale through your mouth around your tongue.
4. Exhale all the way out through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
5. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a count of four.
6. Hold your breath for a count of seven.
7. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight.
8. This is one breath cycle.
9. Now inhale again and repeat the breath cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

Always inhale quietly through your nose and exhale audibly through your mouth. The tip of your tongue stays in position the whole time.

Exhalation takes twice as long as inhalation. The absolute time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed the exercise up, but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8 for the three phases.

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UJJAYI BREATH

“Ocean Sounding Breath”

The Ujjayi breath focuses the mind and generates internal heat. In Ujjai breathing, the glottis is partially closed. The glottis is that part in the throat area that closes when you swallow, but which is open when you breathe. When you partially close the glottis while breathing, you can hear a sound resonate from within, as well as feel a flow of air on the palate. A slightly different sound is heard on inhalation and exhalation. During inhalation, tighten the abdominal muscles very slightly, and during exhalation the abdominal muscles are used to exhale completely.

The Technique:

1. Come into a comfortable seated position with your spine erect, or lie down on your back. Begin taking long, slow, and deep breaths through the nostrils.
2. Allow the breath to be gentle and relaxed as you slightly contract the back of your throat creating a steady hissing sound as you breathe in and out. The sound need not be forced, but it should be loud enough so that if someone came close to you they would hear it.
3. Lengthen the inhalation and the exhalation as much as possible without creating tension anywhere in your body, and allow the sound of the breath to be continuous and smooth.
4. To help create the proper “ah” sound, hold your hand up to your mouth and exhale as if trying to fog a mirror. Inhale the same way. Notice how you constrict the back of the throat to create the fog effect. Now close your mouth and do the same thing while breathing through the nose.

“COMPLETE” OR “THREE-PART” BREATH

The Technique:

1. Sit with your spine erect, or lie down on your back. Begin taking long, slow, and deep breaths through the nostrils.
2. As you inhale, allow the belly to fill with air, drawing air deep into the lower lungs.
3. As you exhale, allow the belly to deflate like a balloon.
4. Repeat several times, keeping the breath smooth and relaxed, and never straining.
5. Repeat several times.
6. Breathe into your belly as in step #1, but also expand the mid-chest region by allowing the rib cage to open outward to the sides.
7. Exhale and repeat several times.
8. Follow steps #1 and #2 and continue inhaling by opening the upper chest.
9. Exhale and repeat. Combining all three steps into one continuous or complete flow.

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BELLOWS BREATH

The Technique:

1. Sit on the floor or in an armless chair with your spine straight.
2. Bend your elbows and make fists with your hands with the upper arms wrapped around the torso.
3. Take a normal natural breath in and out.
4. As you inhale through the nostrils, with some force raise your arms straight up as you open your palms to face outward, spreading your fingers wide.
5. Exhale strongly through the nose as you bring your arms back to the starting position, again making fists with your hands.
6. Do this at a moderate pace fifteen to twenty times.

BREATH OF JOY

The Technique:

1. Stand with your feet a comfortable distance apart and your arms at your sides.
2. Inhale one-third capacity through your nostrils and swing your arms up to shoulder level in front of you.
3. Inhale to two-thirds capacity and stretch your arms out to the sides.
4. Inhale to full capacity and swing your arms up over your head.
5. As you exhale through your mouth, lean forward and stretch your arms out to the sides and slightly behind you.
6. Repeat three to five times.

BREATH OF AWARENESS

This breathing is practiced with concentration placed on the midbrain in the very center of the head for cleansing and awareness.

The Technique:

1. Begin to inhale slowly, but sharply — breathing up toward the crown of the head, feeling the body lifting upward.
2. The inhalation should be made smoothly and continuously for as long as possible. At the peak of inhalation — when no more air can be taken in — quickly, but gently, release the breath downward toward the mouth.
3. Repeat several cycles noticing any changes in sensations as awareness moves from the lower centers to the higher self.

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A BASIC BREATH MEDITATION

(Based on Sharon Salzberg & Joseph Goldstein's Insight Meditation)

According to Sharon Salzberg, mindfulness is one of the main pillars of meditation.

. . . that means being aware of what is going on as it actually arises — not being lost in our conclusions or judgments about it; our fantasies of what it means; our hopes; our fears; our aversions. Rather, mindfulness helps us to see nakedly and directly; “this is what is happening right now.” Through mindfulness, we pay attention to our pleasant experiences, our painful experiences, and our neutral experiences — the sum total of what life brings us.

The second pillar is concentration or

. . . the development of stability of mind, a gathering in and focusing of our normal scattered energy. The state of concentration that we develop in meditative practice is tranquil, at ease, relaxed, open, yielding, gentle, and soft. We let things be; we don't try to hold on to experiences. This state is also alert — it's not about getting so tranquil that we just fall asleep. It's awake, present, and deeply connected with what is going on. This is the balance that we work with in developing concentration.

Therapist should read and record script. Give client a copy of the CD. Have the client play and follow the meditation twice daily. (For people with a history of sexual abuse please begin to practice in five minute intervals — increasing the duration as the client becomes more comfortable with the procedure.)

Client should begin by finding a quiet space where he/she will be undisturbed for the duration of the meditation. Take a comfortable posture sitting on a chair with your back supported and your feet comfortably on the floor.

Play script: “Close your eyes or find a spot a few feet in front of you to place your gaze. Begin to relax. Allow your mind to be spacious. Don't try to make anything happen, just begin to become aware of what is. Slowly bring your attention to the breath. Take a few deep breaths and release. Now allow your breath to return to normal — no need to control or change it in any way. Just notice the natural rhythm of the breath. Wherever you notice the breath most distinctly whether it be at the nostrils, the chest, or the abdomen, allow your attention to rest there.

As you feel the breath, you might silently label it — “in/out or rising and falling.” As you feel the breath enter, noting “in” and as it leaves the body, “out.”

Notice the cycle of the breath as it is appearing right now. Allow yourself to sustain attention through a full cycle. The beginning of the in breath — the end of the in breath, the pause, the beginning of the out breath through to the end of the out breath. Allow yourself to pay attention throughout an entire cycle.

You may find your mind wandering. That's fine. Our minds have been trained to be distracted. It doesn't matter. Each time you notice that you've lost touch with the breath simply notice and very gently bring your attention back . . . come back to the feeling of the breath in this very moment.

You may discover that there's a pause between the in breath and the out breath or between the out breath and the next breath. If you notice a pause, just allow your attention to settle there. Simply noticing what is; allowing the next breath to come naturally. There's nothing you need to do about it. There's no need to alter it or perfect it. Simply notice the breath as it arises.

Many distractions will appear — the mind will wander. It doesn't matter. When you practice you'll need to begin again and again. When you recognize that you've lost touch with

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an awareness of the breath . . . simply and lovingly return your attention to the breath as it is appearing right now. You can end this session by bringing your attention to your hands and feet. Slowly and gently opening your eyes.

INSIGHT MEDITATION KIT (CD)

“ . . . Insight Meditation makes it simple to start meditating in the Buddhist tradition. This elegant gift-boxed set includes two exclusive compact discs with authentic guided meditations, complemented by study cards and a special instruction book with the beginner in mind.”

Sharon Salzberg, cofounder of the Insight Meditation Society & Joseph Goldstein’s *Insight Meditation Kit* (CD), a comprehensive training course in basic meditation.

TO OBTAIN MATERIALS:

Website: <http://store.soundstrue.com/aw00553.html>

WALKING MEDITATION

This is a wonderful practice that can be done right in the middle of daily life, and *integrates* body, breath, and mind. You count internally with exhalation and inhalation, and align this with the steps you are taking while walking. So, for example, you may count 4:4. This means as you walk, you exhale while you internally count off 4 paces. At the end of this, you start to inhale, and count off 4 paces. You count 4 paces with exhalation, and 4 paces with inhalation. You literally speak the numbers as you count them, but only internally, silently in the mind.

Automatically, your breath becomes even. Automatically, your body and breath synchronize. Automatically, your mind synchronizes with the body and breath, by virtue of the internal counting. As you walk, you need to find the right pace that is comfortable, and in alignment with the speed you are walking. You might find that 2:2, 3:3, 4:4, 5:5, 6:6, etc., is the optimum speed for you.

As you get proficient with even breathing, you can shift to two-to-one breathing with walking, such as 6 paces with exhalation, and 3 paces with inhalation. Again, you need to find the pace that is comfortable for you. This practice can easily be done when you are walking even one or two minutes from one place to another. It brings great benefits, right in the middle of daily life, including a calm, peaceful mind and relaxation to the autonomic nervous system.

<u>Exhale</u>	<u>Inhale</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
4	4	1:1
3	3	1:1
5	4	1.25:1
4	3	1.33:1
6	4	1.5:1
3	2	1.5:1
8	4	2:1
6	3	2:1
2	1	2:1