

# Conscious Breathing: Benefits & Techniques to Reduce Stress & Anxiety

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## ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the Conscious breathing to reduce stress and anxiety. Breathing is an umbrella term for methods that direct awareness to the breath. Deep breathing exercises for anxiety can help reduce stress, panic attacks, and fatigue. It deals some people use humming bee breath to relieve frustration, anxiety, and anger. Breathing reduces stress by increasing oxygen exchange, which reduces your blood pressure, slows the heart, and releases any tension held in the abdomen.

*Key Words: Yoga, deep, conscious, breathing, respiration exhalation, relaxation, meditation and concentration.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The paper begins with an explanation of Yoga breathing, as it is most important for you first of all to understand how this deep breathing is done and how it differs from ordinary breathing. Usually we are not conscious of our breathing. Breath passes through our bodies like dream waves. In Yoga, this process is lifted to the level of consciousness. It is you, yourself, who take over the direction and control of the air-flow.

In normal respiration the air is taken in through the nostrils without any special effort, sound or exaggerated movement of the nose or chest. In short, it is done unconsciously. We are not even aware of air traveling through our nostrils, down the nasal and oral parts of the pharynx, of its reaching the larynx and then the trachea and the lungs. More than that, not only are we unaware of the breathing process, but most of us don't know anything about it. You can easily prove this for yourself by asking several friends to answer this simple question: "What happens to the air after it enters the nostrils?" They will probably tell you that it goes to the lungs, although everybody realizes in a general way that the nose does not reach that far in and that there is quite a distance between it and the lungs.

Taking into consideration the limited knowledge we possess about the function of our organism. The paper will try to make the anatomical explanations as simple as possible. It is very easy to demonstrate the deep breathing technique, but not nearly so easy to put it in words. We shall therefore go into it in some detail so that you may be able to grasp the idea correctly.

### **The Anatomy of Breathing:**

Let us begin by analyzing the way the so-called Yoga deep-breathing exercise is usually done and see in what way it differs from ordinary deep breathing. "Coherent Breathing is a method that involves breathing at the rate of five breaths per minute with equal periods of inhalation and exhalation and conscious relaxation of anatomical zones" (Alderman, Lesley 2016)

Take a deep breath. Just put down the book for a moment and do it the way you have always been doing it. Most people vigorously sniff air in through the nostrils, simultaneously raising the chest and popping out the eyes. Yoga deep breathing is not done this way at all. Let us examine what happens when you take the usual kind of deep breath. First of all you interrupt your normal-or unconscious-breathing and make a conscious, deliberate effort to inhale. In doing this, you use considerable force. You also produce a loud sniffing sound by automatically contracting the nostrils. In Yoga deep breathing the process is so entirely different that it is better to completely forget the way you have been doing it and learn anew. To begin with, you do not consciously use the nostrils at all; they remain completely inactive during inhalation and exhalation. Instead, you draw in the air by using the area situated at the back wall of your mouth, called the pharyngeal

area. This connects the mouth with the nose, and is the continuation of the nasal openings which end behind the soft palate leading from the mouth into the throat.

You will understand this still better if you will take a hand mirror and look into it, opening your mouth wide. (I suggest that you once again interrupt your reading and pick up a mirror right now, otherwise you may forget about it.) What you see, especially if you press down the tongue, is a wall in the form of a dome. The air passage is located directly under this dome. This is the pharyngeal area. And it is this area instead of the nostrils which you must learn to use in Yoga deep breathing. This, then, is the main technical difference between ordinary deep breathing and Yoga deep breathing. Have you ever before been aware of the possibility of drawing in a breath through an area other than the nostrils? Probably not. However, people suffering from a post-nasal drip are made very conscious of this other area.

If you sniff in water, especially salt water, through the nostrils and eject it through the mouth, you will instantly become aware of the pharyngeal area, which connects the mouth with the nose. It is this connection that makes it possible to draw the air in through the pharyngeal area, while keeping the nostrils completely inactive during deep breathing. The action is felt only at the back of the throat during the exhalation and the impression is that of a hydraulic suction pump or press operating in the back of the mouth. In fact, the entire action is similar, since during inhalation one feels as if the air were being drawn in, and during exhalation as if it were being pressed down the throat, though in reality, of course, it is being expelled.

It really should not be too difficult for you to do the deep-breathing routine since you have already been doing it for a long time, and without any instructions. Without your being aware of it, this is what takes place while you sleep, for in sleep the sense organism is not functioning and cannot therefore interfere with the rhythm of breathing. When asleep we automatically, or shall I say instinctively, resort to deep breathing at certain intervals. This probably is an indication that deep breathing is of an elemental nature and we can, by means of it, consciously establish a contact between our inner selves and the deep forces of Nature.

**Learning to Breathe Correctly:** Since you know how to do deep breathing while asleep, a simple method of learning to do it during wakefulness should be to simulate sleep. Lie down, close your eyes, relax the whole body, drop the chin and imagine that you are asleep, thus letting your breathing become deeper and deeper. But first a word of warning: When exaggerated and overstrained, deep breathing leads to snoring, so you had better learn to relax and breathe softly and gently! Also, the next time you happen to be in a room with someone who is fast asleep, listen for a while to his or her respiration; you will quickly notice the difference both in sound and rhythm, between the “waking” and the “sleeping” breath.

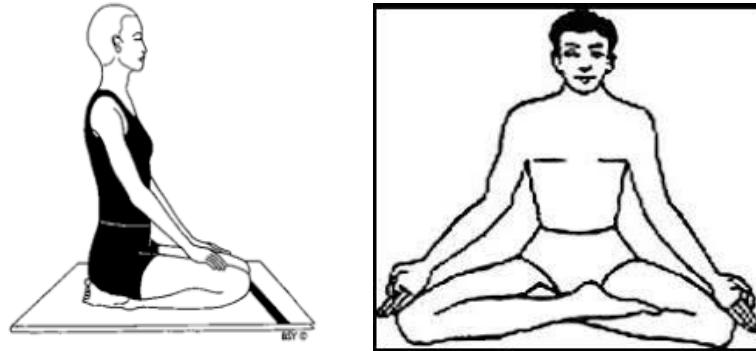
In Yoga deep breathing, you start filling the lower part of the lungs first, and then you fill the middle and upper part. When exhaling you first empty the upper part of the lungs, then the middle, and last of all the lower part.

This process, however, is not divided into three separate actions. Inhalation is done in one smooth continuous flow just as one might pour water in filling a glass. First the bottom is filled, then the middle, and finally the upper portion. But the process itself -pouring in order to fill the entire glass-is an uninterrupted one. Just so is the air taken in, in one uninterrupted inhalation, while the lungs fill with air, just so is the air expelled until the lungs are empty. But you must do it slowly and in a most relaxed manner. No effort or strain should ever be exerted. This is very important.

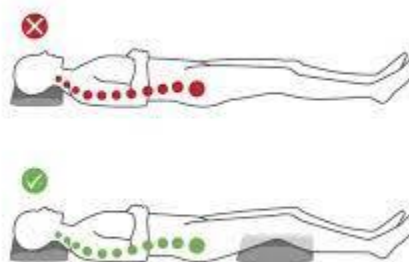
You then become aware of the function of your own diaphragm. You expand the flanks when inhaling and contract them when exhaling. The lower part of the rib cage naturally expands first when you breathe in and is compressed last when you let that air out. This too should be done gently, without any force or strain. The chest remains motionless and passive during the entire process of respiration. Only the ribs expand during inhalation and contract during exhalation, accordion-fashion. To use force during inhalation is completely wrong. One should do it with ease, without any tension or strain whatever. In deep breathing, exhalation is as important as inhalation because it eliminates poisonous matter. The lower part of our lungs seldom are sufficiently emptied, and tend to accumulate air saturated with waste products, for with ordinary breathing we never expel enough of the carbon dioxide our system throws off even if we do inhale enough oxygen. If, on the other hand, the lower part of the lungs are properly expanded and contracted, the circulation in the liver and spleen which are thus “massaged” by the diaphragm, are greatly benefited. “Vipassana Meditation focuses on breathing in and around the nose to calm the mind (anapanasati)( Hart, William 1987)

Another important thing to remember is that while doing deep breathing the spine should be kept straight, so as not to impair the free flow of the life-force, or Prana. This also helps to develop correct posture. The yogis attach such great

importance to correct posture that they have devised several different positions for their various advanced breathing practices as well as for meditation and concentration.



The favorite posture is the Lotus Pose, or **Padmasana**, a word derived from Padma, which means lotus in Sanskrit, and **Asana**, which means posture. (The accent in **Padmasana** falls on the first syllable of the second word, Asana, not on the second as would be natural in English.) The other three postures are and **Samasana**, **Swastikasana**, and **Smasana**. You will learn them one by one later on. “Transformational Breath uses a full relaxed breath that originates in the lower abdomen and repeats inhalation and exhalation without pausing. It integrates other healing modalities and breathes analysis. A key feature is intensive personal coaching and the use of 'bodymapping' (Kravitz, Judith 1999)



In all of these postures the spine has to be kept erect, in one straight line with the head, neck and trunk. The necessity for keeping the spine straight is emphasized in all Yoga practices where it is a must. We human beings are the only inhabitants of this planet who have a vertical spine, whereas in animals it extends horizontally. Only man, the crowning creation, through the awakening of his consciousness has acquired a vertical spine. Yoga reminds us of this; it is considered a symbolical connecting link between earth and heaven. “Rebirthing uses conscious breathing to purge repressed birth memories and traumatic childhood memories” (Orr, Leonard 2007)

When you sit down on the floor with your legs crossed, visualize a stream running through you in a straight line, starting at the top of your head and continuing into the ground. Imagine, too, that this is the axis around which your body has been moulded. This will help you learn to sit up straight without being stiff and tense. You should, in fact, feel comfortable and relaxed as you sit this way.

**Your First Deep Breath:** Now as you sit down on your exercise mat, get ready to start your first real lesson in deep breathing. If for some reason you are unable to sit on the floor, you may sit on a chair or else stand up. Deep breathing can also be done lying down, provided the spine is kept straight. But normally we should do it while sitting cross-legged. If you cannot assume the Lotus Pose as yet, cross your legs in any way easiest for you. “Holotropic Breathing was developed by Stanislav Grof and uses deepened breathing to allow access to non-ordinary states of consciousness” (Grof, Stanislav 2010)

Again, first check your posture. The spine should be straight, the head erect, hands on knees, eyes closed. Now concentrate on the pharyngeal space at the back wall of your mouth and, slightly contracting its muscles, begin to draw in the air through that space as if you were using a suction pump. Do it slowly and steadily, letting the pumping sound be clearly heard. Don't use the nostrils; remember that they remain inactive during the entire respiration process. When inhaling let your ribs expand sideways like an accordion-beginning with the lower ones, of course. Remember the chest and shoulders

should remain motionless. The entire inhalation should be done gently and effortlessly. When it has been completed pause for a second or two, holding the breath. Then slowly begin breathing out. The exhalation is usually not as passive as the inhalation. You use a slight, a very slight; pressure to push the air out-although it feels as though you pressed it against the throat like a hydraulic press. The upper ribs are now contracted first, the nostrils remain inactive and the chest and shoulders motionless. At the end of the exhalation, pull in the stomach a little so as to push out all the air.

The beginner should not try to take too full a breath at once. Start by breathing to the count of four. Then hold the breath, counting to two, and start slowly exhaling, again to the count of four. Breathing in and out to an equal number of beats is called rhythmic breathing. You allow four beats to fill your lungs, two to retain the breath, and four to breathe out. The respiration should be timed in such a way that at the end of the four beats you have completed the exhalation. Don't just stop at the end of the count when there is still air to be expelled. You should adjust your breathing to the timing. Repeat, but do not take more than 5 or 6 deep breaths at one time during the first week. This is enough for today. You shouldn't do more even if you are enjoying it. Be careful not to overdo the breathing, especially inhalation, as this may lead to unpleasant results such as dizziness, nausea, headaches, and even fainting spells due to hyperventilation caused by a sudden, excessive intake of oxygen. You should not invite unnecessary trouble instead of getting full benefit out of these lessons. As your teacher, it is my duty to warn you against possible ill effects caused by over-breathing. Please be patient; it is for your own good that I am offering this advice.

Deep breathing is often quite a revelation to people who do it for the first time. "I just discovered my lungs," a man once said to me. Incidentally he happened to be a photographer who came with a reporter to take my picture during an interview. Both got interested in Yoga and admitted they badly needed it because, to use their own words, "everybody in the newspaper Office has an ulcer and suffers from tension."

### CONCLUSION

If you want to see how the ribs expand during inhalation and contract during exhalation, watch yourself in the mirror. The chest should then remain uncovered, of course, at least to the waistline. It should also be a joy to you to discover your lungs, and to know that you can consciously take a deep breath and direct it to any part of your body you desire.

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