

Breathe deep for better mental health

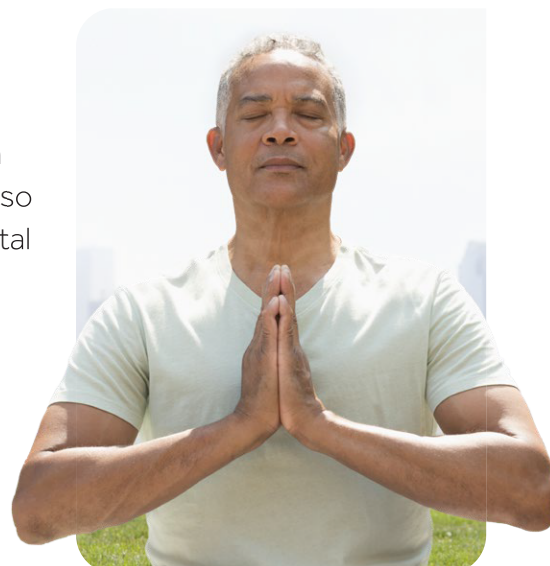
Take a deep breath.

We instinctively do it several times each day. You take a big breath before you jump into things literally, like a pool, or figuratively, like a task that requires mental focus. We use a deep breath to clear our minds, signal the start of something new, or even to bring a moment of calm when it's busy.

How deep breathing works

When you take a deep breath, you fill your lungs with oxygen and that stimulates your parasympathetic nervous system. The infusion of oxygen calms down your sympathetic nervous system's "fight or flight" response and increases your "rest and digest" mode. This can increase your feelings of peace and calm.¹ Deep, slow breathing is also shown to decrease muscle tension and may support improved mental health.²

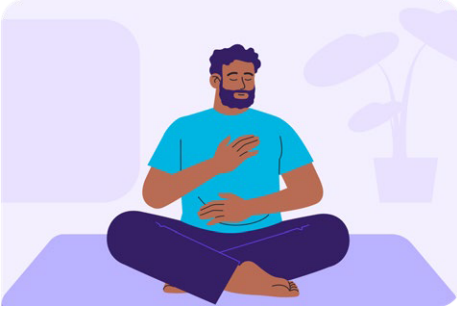
There's been a lot of attention on high-level athletes and top executives using breath work to get through their challenges and perform better. However, it's not just for them. Some wellness, exercise and medical professionals hold the opinion that deep breathing practices can benefit many people. It costs nothing but a few minutes and may offer physical and mental health rewards.



Before you start any new exercise routine, talk to a doctor to make sure it's safe.

The following breathing exercises are used in meditation, the practices of yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi and more. Find your favorite or just take a deep breath—it's that easy.

Belly breathing



Deep belly breathing can help strengthen the diaphragm, lessen the work of breathing and decrease oxygen demand.³

- From a seated or lying position, place one hand on your chest and one hand on your abdomen. The bottom hand should do the moving. The top hand should remain still.
- Inhale through your nose for about 4 seconds, feeling your abdomen expand.
- Hold your breath for 2 seconds.
- Exhale very slowly and steadily through your mouth for about 6 seconds.

Pursed lip breathing



Pursed lip breathing slows your breathing pace, which can make each breath more effective. It also helps increase the amount of oxygen in your lungs.³

- Inhale slowly through your nose for 2 seconds with your mouth closed. You don't need to take a deep breath; a normal breath is OK.
- Purse (pucker) your lips as though you're going to whistle.
- Exhale slowly and gently through your pursed lips for 4 or more seconds. It may be helpful to count to yourself.

Box breathing



Box breathing, or square breathing, can reset the mind and body after a stressful situation by breathing in patterns of 4.⁴

- Exhale, then breathe in through your nose as you slowly count to 4 in your head. Fill your lungs and let your stomach rise.
- Hold your breath for a count of 4.
- Exhale for a count of 4.
- Hold your breath again for a count of 4.
- Repeat 3 or 4 times.

This is not a lot of hot air. The simple act of deliberately catching your breath can lead you to a calmer, more restful and relaxed mental state.

Learn how Livongo can help support you on your wellness journey.
To sign up or learn more, go to Go.Livongo.com.

¹<https://www.utoledo.edu/studentaffairs/counseling/anxietytoolbox/breathingandrelaxation.html>

²<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10013266/>

³<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/breathlessness-clinic/breathing-techniques>

⁴<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/box-breathing-benefits/>