

B R E A T H E

How to use breath to relax and reduce stress

By making your exhales longer than your inhales, you can switch your nervous system from “fight or flight” to “rest and digest” in just a few minutes. Learning how to make your out-breath longer than your in-breath can shut off the flow of stress hormones caused by anxiety and current events.

Note: If you have asthma, please take care with this and discontinue if you feel any discomfort at all.

- **Start by finding a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down.**
- **Place both hands on your belly, or one on your belly and one on your chest. This helps to bring awareness to your breath. You’re welcome to close your eyes if that’s comfortable for you.**
- **Start by taking a few breaths and simply count how many seconds you naturally inhale and then exhale. Don’t try to change your breath yet, just notice and count.**
- **Next try to add 1 second to your exhale. Example: If you normally breathe in and out for a count of 3, try inhaling for 3 and exhaling for a count of 4. As you breathe out, purse your lips as if you were very gently blowing out a candle. This helps to be aware of slowing down the out-breath.**
- **Another option for bringing attention to the exhale is to breathe in through your nose and then partly open your mouth on the out-breath and create a quiet whisper sound in the back of your throat. You can pretend that you’re gently and slowly trying to fog up a mirror or window. This is called Ujjayi breathing. It shouldn’t be loud, you may hear a faint whisper or “seashell” or “ocean” sound in your throat.**
- **Once you feel comfortable with making your exhale longer than your inhale, you can work on gradually making the out-breath even longer. For example, if your in-breath is for a count of 3, try to extend your exhale to a count of 5 or 6 by using the different techniques above like pursing your lips or using Ujjayi breath.**

Doing this for just a couple of minutes is enough to take your nervous system out of the stress zone and into the relaxed zone.

