

Breathing for Relaxation and Health

By Julie T. Lusk

Time: 10 minutes

Effective relaxation requires proper breathing. In this script, participants concentrate on their breathing by focusing on what their bodies feel like as they take in deep breaths, hold them briefly, and slowly exhale.

Note to facilitators: The following information will help participants understand the importance of slow, deep, rhythmic breathing. You may wish to present it as an introduction before using this script.

Breathe in and out through the nose, not the mouth, unless directed otherwise. The nose filters out pollutants and it moistens and warms the air.

Breathing should be natural, smooth, easy, slow, quiet and complete.

Exhaling fully and deeply is the first step to better breathing. It stimulates the functioning of the brain cells and rids the system of stale air. Exhaling helps activate the relaxation response via the parasympathetic nervous system and it lowers the heart rate. Exhaling fully creates ample room for the inhalation.

More importantly, taking time for fully inhaling and exhaling slows the breathing rate down. Slowing the breathing rate down causes the brain to get more oxygen. This results in heightened awareness, increased alertness, and calmness. It diffuses anxiety and nervousness.

Oxygenation of the body is essential to physical health and well-being. Breathing abdominally rather than chest breathing results in a greater transfer of oxygen into the blood for better delivery of nutrients to the tissues. Cells utilize oxygen to create energy. Oxygen is necessary for the development of all organs in the body. Red blood cells are completely renewed every 120 days. The most essential element for accomplishing this reconstruction is not food, but oxygen.

Shallow and irregular breathing can result in the accumulation of bodily wastes and toxins and inadequate functioning of all body organs and tissues. It is also an indicator of stress. Breathing that is slow, smooth, and deep helps alleviate these issues and leads to a clear and alert mind. It also improves the flow of lymph which can improve the immunity system.

Script

Close your eyes ... and bring your attention to your breathing ... It's time to begin following the air as it comes in ... and as it goes out while breathing through your nose.

Continue feeling your breath each time it comes in ... and as it goes out ... If your mind begins to wander, just bring it back to feeling and sensing your breath.

Notice if you can feel movement in your belly... your ribs...and your collar-bone while breathing naturally. Take your time.

During the next several cycles of breathing, empty your lungs more than usual each time you breathe out. Let all the air out, compressing your stomach to squeeze out all the stale air and carbon dioxide ... Letting it all empty out.

Each time you breathe in, take in a nice, full, deep breath and let the air go all the way to the bottom of your lungs. Feel your stomach rise, your chest expand, and the collar bone area fill.

As you breathe in, your diaphragm expands and massages all the internal organs in the abdominal area ... this helps digestion.

As you breathe out, relax ... allowing any tension or knots in your belly to naturally untie ... to let go.

Breathing in ... Fully and completely.

Breathing out ... Letting it all go ... relaxing more and more ... Breathing heals you ... calms you ... it's soothing.

When breathing in fully and completely. Oxygen is entering your blood stream, and nourishes all your organs and cells. It protects you.

Breathing out releases metabolic waste and toxins. Your breath is cleansing you ... healing you.

Let's use the breath in another way and take advantage of the mind-body connection.

Leaders note: Use one or more of the following, depending on the group's needs or time available. Give participants enough time to experience this.

If you wish, imagine exhaling confusion ... and inhaling clarity.

Imagine exhaling darkness ... and inhaling light.

Imagine exhaling fear ... and inhaling love.

Exhaling pain...and inhaling relief.

Exhaling anxiety ... and inhaling peace.

Exhaling selfishness ... and inhaling generosity.

Exhaling guilt ... and inhaling forgiveness.

Exhaling weakness ... and inhaling courage

During the next few breathing cycles, breathe in through your nose and sigh out through your mouth. Let the air stay out as long as it's comfortable, and naturally allowing another breath to come in by itself.

Let your breath return to its normal and natural pace, and return to using your nose. Continue to naturally breathe slowly, smoothly, and deeply ... Letting your breathing be steady, easy, and quiet.

Each time you exhale ... allow yourself to feel peaceful ... calm ... and completely relaxed.

If your mind wanders, bring your attention back to your breath.

Pause

Stretch and open your eyes, feeling refreshed, rejuvenated, alert, and fully alive.

If you are doing this with more than one person, continue the last instruction until everyone is awake and alert.