

Breathe Your Way to Bliss

WEEK TWO - MINDFULNESS MONTH

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We all know how to breathe to stay alive. However, when we take control of our breathing, there is a whole new world of possibilities to unlock. By bringing our attention to, being mindful of our breath, we can change our physiology, mood and thoughts in just a few moments. The art of mindful breathing is a good tool to hold up your sleeve for times when you can feel the tears brewing, the stress mounting, the rage building and so on.

What is the diaphragm?

The diaphragm is a double-dome shaped muscle that is located below the lungs. It primarily functions to aid respiration by contracting and flattening when you inhale. This creates a vacuum effect that pulls air into the lungs. When you exhale, the diaphragm relaxes and the air is pushed out of the lungs.



How does diaphragmatic breathing benefit me?

Studies have shown a variety of benefits to diaphragmatic breathing including:

- Helps with digestion - activating the diaphragm promotes gentle massaging motions to the gastrointestinal organs. This positively impacts symptoms such as bloating, abdominal pain, urgency and constipation.
- Helps with lifting weight safely - if you're a weight lifter or just enjoy weight training, it is essential to brace your core in order to protect your lower back from injuries. Belly breathing is a great way to prime the diaphragm and abdominal muscles required for bracing your core.
- Helps release toxins and aids recovery - our bodies are designed to release 70% of its toxins through breathing. If we are not engaging with a full breath, we aren't able to release as much toxic build up. Studies have shown that diaphragmatic breathing increases the antioxidant defense status after exhaustive exercise and also lower cortisol levels (a stress hormone) and increase melatonin (a hormone that regulates your body's sleep/wake cycle).
- Relieves tension and promotes parasympathetic activity - when we breathe via the diaphragm it promotes relaxation through stimulating the vagus nerve. 75% of the fibres from the vagus nerve are part of the parasympathetic nervous system which is in charge of the "rest and repair" functions. The deeper the breath, the more stimulation to the vagus more, so the more we relax!
- Improves posture - you can't fully engage with your diaphragm or belly breathe in a slouched posture. When you belly breathe - you're forced to open up the chest and utilise your lungs a lot more - promoting more of an upright posture bringing your shoulders back and down.
- Reduces anxiety - research has shown a marked decrease in anxiety scores in individuals that undergo belly breathing. This can be linked to the vagus stimulation that occurs whilst deep breathing as well as other physiological changes such as lowering heart rates and breathing rates.





How to breathe with your diaphragm:

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1. While you count to four, take a deep breath in through your nose, right into your belly. Let it fill up like a balloon. (You may want to place your hands on your belly to feel it expand)
2. Hold that breath for 1, 2, 3, 4.
3. Slowly breathe out through your mouth (pursed lips) for a count of 8.
4. Hold again for 1, 2, 3, 4.

Repeat steps 1 – 4 as many times as you need to in order to feel your mind and your body relaxing.

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