



Proper breathing is an underestimated, but critical building block of good health. Slow, deep breathing gets rid of carbon dioxide waste and takes plenty of clean, fresh oxygen to your brain and muscles. More blood cells get the new, oxygen-rich air instead of the same old stale stuff. Experts estimate that proper breathing helps your body eliminate toxins 15 times faster than poor, shallow breathing. You'll not only be healthier, but you'll be able to perform better (mentally and physically) and, of course, be less stressed and more relaxed.

Here's an exercise that will help you get the full benefits of good breathing. The techniques in this exercise are ones you should try to develop in your normal breathing, and that could take practice. Try to take about 10 minutes, but it can happen in five by cutting the time for each step in half. Most of it can be done anywhere you need to relax or clear your head:

1. **Get Ready** (2 minutes) Make the room dark, or at least darker. Lie down flat on your back, or sit against a wall. Use a pillow for comfort. Make sure no part of your body is strained or supporting weight. Close your eyes. Just pay attention to your breathing for a minute or two. Don't try to change it, just notice how it feels. Imagine the fresh blood flowing through your body. Listen to your surroundings.

2. **Stage I** (2 minutes) Practice breathing in and out of your nose. Exhaling through the mouth is okay for quick relaxation, but for normal breathing, in and out the nose is best. Take long breaths, not deep breaths. Try not to force it, you shouldn't hear your breath coming in or out. You're drawing slow breaths, not gulping it or blowing it out. Feel the rhythm of your breathing.
  
3. **Stage II** (3 minutes) Good breathing is done through the lower torso, rather than the upper torso. Each breath should expand your belly, your lower back and ribs. Relax your shoulders and try not to breathe with your chest. Put your hands on your stomach and feel them rise and fall. If it's not working, push down gently with your hands for a few breaths and let go. Your stomach should start to move more freely. Relax your face, your neck, your cheeks, your jaw, your temples, even your tongue.
  
4. **Stage III** (3 minutes) Feel the good air entering your lungs and feel the stale air leaving your body. "In with the good, out with the bad" is definitely true here. Make your exhale as long as your inhale to make sure all the bad air is gone. Remember, long slow breaths. Most people take 12-16 breaths per minute. Ideally, it should be 8-10. Now try to make your exhale a little longer than your inhale for a while. Pause after your exhale without taking a breath. Focus on the stillness and on not forcing an inhale. Your body will breathe when it needs to.
  
5. **Wake Up!!!**