



Breath & Relaxation Exercises

(1) Expanding Peripheral Vision & Opening the Diaphragm

(most effective if done for 15-20 min)

Most breath holding patterns involve a contraction of the diaphragm and of the eyes. Learning how to open the diaphragm, expand the peripheral vision, and soften the eyes results in a state of relaxation and overall enhanced state of health. Softening the muscles of the eyes and head also helps to reduce tension headaches, migraines, and neck and upper back stiffness.

- Sit in a comfortable and relaxed position, in a chair or on a cushion.
- Put one hand on your diaphragm just underneath the tip of the sternum. Feel the movement of the diaphragm underneath your fingers.
- Focus your eyes hard on a point, squinting slightly as you exclude everything from your field of vision but that one object. With this “narrow focus or vision” notice what happens to your breathing. Notice if your diaphragm feels restricted and tightened.
- Open your “peripheral vision” so you sense the visual field all around you. Notice if you feel your diaphragm widening, and your breath lengthening and deepening. Notice if you feel less muscular tension in your eyes, head, and neck.
- To practice “softening the eyes” imagine looking from behind your eyes, “receiving” images around you rather than projecting the eyes outwards and “retrieving” the images.
- During your day when you feel stressed take a moment to practice expanding your peripheral vision, relaxing the diaphragm, and softening the eyes.

(2) Three-Part Exhalation (most effective if done for 10-15 min)

Dividing the exhalation into three parts helps lengthen the exhalation and stimulates a lengthening and deepening of the inhalation. This is effective in diminishing stress, slowing down the mind, and creating a deeper sense of relaxation. It is also a helpful technique for assistance in falling asleep and in diminishing general anxiety.

- Lie in a comfortable position using blankets or cushions to support your back or neck.
- Spend a few minutes to consciously relax the body.
- Take a normal breath in and then divide the exhalation into three equal parts, pausing briefly between each part. (inhale, exhale-pause, exhale-pause, exhale-pause, inhale again)
- Take one or two normal breaths and then repeat the three-part exhale. Do this cycle ten times.
- You may want to visualize the breath movement as a waterfall flowing down, collecting in a pool during the pause, and then flowing down to the next pool.

Notes: The pause should be a moment of suspension as when you say “ah”, rather than a feeling of contracting or holding the breath. If you feel a real strain or grasping, return to normal breathing. The less you “try” or “strive”, the longer the exhalation becomes. Feel each exhalation as a surrendering and “letting go.”

(3) Abdominal Breathing (most effective if done for 10-15 min)

Breathing to this focused region has a sedative effect inducing relaxation by lowering blood pressure and respiratory rate. It can be very effective for assistance in falling asleep and in dealing with particularly stressful events. It is also effective in training and fully utilizing the diaphragm.

- Lie or sit in a comfortable position, using any blankets or cushions for support.
- Begin by observing the breath as you inhale exaggerating the expansion caused by the downward motion of your diaphragm.
- Place your hands on your abdomen at or below your navel. You will notice the lower abdomen gently swell during inhalation. Feel this expansion or swelling as the abdomen fans out in all directions out from your body - in the front, sides, and back.
- For an additional release of built-up stress, open your mouth and audibly let out a long sigh on your exhalation.