

Health Advice

Breathe more deeply for once – for a more relaxed working day

We breathe twelve to 20 times a minute without thinking about it. With every breath we take, our body performs a highly sophisticated miracle: the air flows through our respiratory tract and through our nose, throat, larynx and bronchial tubes and into our lungs, where the vital oxygen that we breathe in is exchanged for carbon dioxide. Each of us has about 300 million alveoli. Their surface area is breathtakingly large: approximately 70 square metres, which is about 40 times the surface area of the entire human body. Our breathing responds very sensitively to external influences, to our everyday, our physical movements and our emotions: when we run, we get out of breath; when we're nervous before a presentation, we breathe more quickly and shallowly, and when we're scared, we also get out of breath. While we usually breathe subconsciously, in certain situations, we can suddenly feel how our body reacts: how our stress levels, nervousness and concentration are reflected in our breathing rate and depth, and how our blood pressure and heart rate also increase.

However, this also means that if we consciously control our breathing, we can have a positive and calming effect on our body. Studies have shown that "breathwork", or consciously controlling your breathing, can reduce your stress levels and increase your psychological well-being. According to a new study, conscious breathing also helps with anxiety and pain, with patients' perception of pain decreasing after just 20 minutes of mindful breathing. Researchers have also discovered that slower breathing, with longer exhalations than inhalations, activates the vagus nerve. The vagus nerve is part of the central nervous system and, together with the parasympathetic nervous system, ensures feelings of inner peace and relaxation. It also has a positive effect on our digestion. Its counterpart is the sympathetic nervous system, which gives us power and strength, but can also put us under stress. You can strengthen your parasympathetic nervous system by taking a mini-break in acutely stressful situations and concentrating on your breathing. You will notice that your heart rate and breathing rate will slow down – and your body will sense that everything is fine. For a generally lower level of stress, put aside at least five minutes for conscious breathing exercises every day. Give them a try now!

Here are three simple exercises for longer breathing and bringing more calm to your working day:

■ Exercise 1: A more relaxed working day with the 4-7-8 breathing technique

Do stress, tension and deadline pressures leave you with no time for a breather? Get it back with the 4-7-8 breathing technique. This technique calms your heart rate and also works when standing: Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds. Hold your breath for 7 seconds. Then breathe out through your mouth for 8 seconds. Repeat this exercise several times.

■ Exercise 2: Improve your mood with "cyclic sighing"

The "cyclic sighing" technique consists of a consciously long exhalation. This lowers your pulse rate and blood pressure and calms your body and mind while improving your mood and well-being. To do this, breathe in deeply through your nose, hold your breath briefly and then breathe in deeply through your nose again to fill your lungs with even more air. Then breathe out very slowly through your mouth, as if you were blowing through a straw. The exhalation should be significantly longer than the two inhalations.

■ Exercise 3: Come over more calmly with the 6-3-6-3 methode

Do you have an important presentation or speech to make, and are you nervous? Our voice sounds different when we're stressed. Calm your nerves and your voice before your presentation starts with the 6-3-6-3 method: set the timer on your smartphone for two minutes. Sit down in a relaxed position with your back straight and eyes closed. Breathe in through your nose deeply until your belly sticks out a little. Count slowly to 6. Hold your breath and count to 3. Breathe out through your mouth while counting to 6 again. Hold your breath and count to 3. Repeat until the timer chimes.



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