- Respiration

Breathe YOURSELF BETTER

Are you making the most of your inhales and exhales? Try these techniques to give yourself a boost

Sleeping badly? Got no energy and feeling frazzled? Forget spending a fortune on staying well. We already have the most effective (and free!) piece of equipment to help us to feel better – our lungs. 'Changing the way you breathe can improve your physical and mental health, plus your emotional wellbeing, affecting the way you feel, think, act, operate and perform,' says breathing expert Stuart Sandeman, founder of Breathpod. Here's how to harness the power of your breath.



Are you doing it right?

'It's impossible to feel good, think straight or sleep well if your breathing is out of whack,' says Stuart. Although we inhale and exhale over 20,000 times a day, most of us do it incorrectly. Try these simple tweaks for better habits.

*** BE AWARE OF YOUR BREATH**
Is your breathing pattern fast, slow or irregular? 'You'll notice variations in depth, speed, length and location in the body,' says Stuart.

*** CLOSE YOUR MOUTH**
'Breathing through the nose naturally slows down your breathing so your in-breaths and out-breaths are of equal length, balancing out the nervous system,' says Stuart.

*** AVOID BREATHING FROM THE CHEST**
Many of us breathe from the upper chest, rather than using the diaphragm. 'Chest breathing arises when you're anxious, stressed or startled,' says Stuart. Check your diaphragm is engaged by placing your hands on your belly. It should rise and fall with each inhale and exhale.

*** DON'T HOLD YOUR BREATH**
Restricting your breath is common in times of stress, says Stuart. 'Check you're not "forgetting" to breathe, for example when sending an important email.'

YOUR EXERCISES

Tips to help you tackle those little health woes.

Control anxiety

'Box breathing can take you out of fight-or-flight mode,' explains Stuart. 'This helps you to calm down.'

1 Inhale through your nose for four seconds.
2 Hold your breath for a count of four.
3 Exhale through your nose for a count of four.
4 Hold your breath for a count of four.
5 Repeat four times.

Beat hot flushes

'Coherent breathing is a really effective way to manage menopausal flushes,' says Stuart.

1 Breathe in for four seconds.
2 Breathe out for six – gently.
3 Repeat for 10 minutes, twice a day, and at the start of a hot flush.

Shift low mood

'This can induce gamma waves in the brain and feelings of calm and happiness,' says Stuart.

1 Sit up straight with your eyes closed, and gently smile.
2 Place your index fingers in your ears.

COMMERCIAL DISTRIBUTION IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED • PRINTED FROM PRESSREADER • NOT FOR SALE • PERSONAL COPY • DISTRIBUTION STRICTLY PROHIBITED



COMMERCIAL DISTRIBUTION IS PROHIBITED
PRINTED FROM PRESSREADER
NOT FOR SALE
periodicalqcpublicllibrary@gmail.com
PERSONAL COPY

Power up

Some of these exercises can be done on the go, while others require more stillness, says Stuart. Just take your time. 'Changes may take a month or two of daily practice.'

3 Inhale deeply and steadily through your nose.
4 Exhale in a slow and controlled way, making a humming sound ('mmm').
5 Repeat five times.

Lower blood pressure

This one involves simply doubling the length of the exhale to the inhale length, says Stuart.
1 Inhale through your nose for a count of four.
2 Exhale through pursed lips for a count of eight.
3 Inhale through your nose for a count of five.
4 Exhale through pursed lips for a count of 10.
5 Inhale through your nose for a count of six.
6 Exhale for a count of 12.

Sort insomnia

'Here, we want to slow the mind in order to nod off,' says Stuart.
1 Inhale through your nose for a count of four.
2 Hold your breath for a count of six.
3 Exhale through pursed lips for a count of eight.
4 Repeat four times.

Ease joint pain

'Short, shallow breaths activate stress receptors, which heighten heart rate and spike insulin levels,' says Stuart. 'This increases muscle and joint tension, increasing pain. But deep breaths allow more oxygen to the muscles to relax them.'
1 Breathe in for five.
2 Hold for five.
3 Breathe out slowly for 10.

Improve your strategy

Try these at-home aids...

Best books

THE ART OF BREATHING
by Dr Danny Penman
(£9.99, HarperCollins)
Tips for handling specific situations.

BREATHE
by Mary Birch
(£13.99, Little, Brown)
A four-week breathing retraining plan, written by a former nurse.

THE LITTLE BOOK OF BREATHING
by Una L Tudor
(£7.99, Octopus)
Great for popping in your handbag for guidance on the go.

Handy apps

BREATHWRK
(free, App Store and Google Play)
Master techniques to ease pain, stress, low energy and more. You can track your progress, too.

IBREATHE
(free, App Store)
Easy guided exercises, plus you can create reminders to breathe better throughout the day.

BREATHE EASY
(free, App Store and Google Play)
Learn 'paced breathing' by inhaling and exhaling in time to the shape on your screen.

PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY. IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP