- Respiration / Immune system

Breathe Better for Your Whole Body

BY *Amanda Gardner*



BREATHING EXERCISES CAN help lungs function well and recover more quickly after a bout of any respiratory infection. But that's not the only benefit to working out your lungs just as you work out your body. Regularly doing breathing exercises can boost your immune system and help your body fight infection by reducing stress and lowering blood pressure.

First, try diaphragmatic breathing. Most people breathe primarily in the upper chest, especially when they are stressed or anxious, says Talia Pollok, who specializes in cardiovascular and pulmonary physical therapy in Charlottesville, Virginia. "Diaphragmatic breathing for five minutes in the morning before you get out of bed, and in the evening before you go to bed, can help your nervous system calm down," she says.

Here's how to do it: Lie on your back with your head elevated and your knees supported. Breathe deeply through your nose. Then exhale through your mouth, taking two or three times as long as you did to inhale.

DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING FOR FIVE MINUTES CAN HELP YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM CALM DOWN.

A variation is called pursed-lip breathing. This technique helps keep airways open. It's often recommended for people with chronic lung conditions, but it's useful for healthy people as well. Breathe in through your nose, just as you do for diaphragmatic breathing, but for the exhale, purse your lips together and blow your breath out through your mouth, also taking at least twice as long to exhale as you did to inhale.

If you have—or had—COVID-19 or another respiratory condition, it's a good idea to check with a health professional before starting any breathing exercises. But, in general, these exercises are safe for anyone to try. R

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