

FAST FACTS

Breathwork

Controlled ventilation

What

A wide variety of breathing techniques that are done for the purpose of breath control. It is a powerful way to deliberately activate our parasympathetic nervous system, a branch of the autonomic nervous system. The autonomic nervous system (sympathetic: fight, flight, freeze, or parasympathetic: rest, digest, repair) is ancient survival programming that has worked to keep humans both alive and safe for all of existence. In today's modern world many people spend an inordinate amount of time in a sympathetic state. The cost of this is that the body's innate intelligence will not prioritise sleep, healing, hormones, digestion or detox while it attends to perceived threat and immediate survival.

The good news is that breathing is the fastest, most efficient, and most effective way to communicate to your nervous system that you are 'safe' and therefore attention can go towards those systems for health.

How it works

When using breathwork to move out of stress and into calm, the key points to remember are:

- Ensure your exhale is longer than your inhale
- Ideally take breath in through the nostrils as important signalling occurs through this pathway, alongside warming and filtering the air
- At the time of breathing, sync up with your body to mindfully release any tension. Check tension in jaw, shoulders, tummy and back as starting points

Some popular styles of breath work include:

- Box breathing
- Pursed lip breathing
- Resonant breathing
- [Diaphragmatic breathing](#)
- Alternate nostril breathing

In order to remember to practice controlled breathwork, you can anchor it to an existing daily habit whilst you build it into your healthful portfolio.



Pros

- It is free
- Can be done anywhere
- Is immediate in changing the body's physiology

Cons

- It can be easy to forget
- It can be difficult to physically access deep breathing. If that is the case, practice while lying down to get used to taking deeper breaths
- Confusion about which style is most appropriate
- Some forms of breath work activate the sympathetic nervous system. Be clear on your goals before starting a new technique

Contraindications

Some forms of breath work are intense and can feel overwhelming or lead to dizziness and tingling. Holotropic breath work should never be practiced in or near water.

Learn more

[4-7-8 breath technique](#)

Breath, by James Nestor

[Dr Mark Hyman](#)