

Just Breathe

Did you know you can boost your digestion, lower your heart rate, lower your stress levels and sleep better if you know how to breathe properly? You may be thinking, “Surely I don’t have to think about my breathing. Doesn’t it just happen naturally?” Yes and no. It does happen without us having to think about it, but when we practice purposeful breathing exercises, we can have a profound impact on our mind, our body, our nervous and endocrine systems. Many people spend their days breathing like a tiger is constantly chasing them. They bounce their nervous system around, banging it back and forth, and seem to just be responding to their environment on autopilot all day long. These people live in fight or flight. If you feel like this, you can take control of your nervous system, your mind, your body, and your health by purposefully and mindfully breathing. You can move your body into a place of rest and digest. Here are a couple of simple breathing exercises you can do. The first one is called, “Water Breathing”, and you can do it anytime you feel anxious or feel that fight or flight sensation. The second one is called, “Whiskey Breathing”, and it helps you to relax and sleep better.

“Water Breathing”

This type of breathing gets its name because just like water, it is always good for you, and you can use it anytime you need balance in your body. Begin by sitting in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and mouth. Inhale 4 counts in through your nose and exhale 4 counts out your nose. Do this 10 times. If you do not begin to feel balance returning, repeat 10 times again. We tend to breathe shallowly and quickly when we are in fight or flight mode. Water Breathing slows our breathing down to 4 to 6 breaths per minute and saturates our bodies with oxygen. The cool thing about Water Breathing is that just like you can carry a water bottle with you anywhere you go, you can carry this technique with you as well. This is an immensely powerful tool, but you must stop rushing around and spend time practicing it.

“Whiskey Breathing”

This type of breathing gets its name because like whiskey, it can be used to help the body relax at bedtime but without any alcohol aftereffects. It is best done once you are in bed lying down. Begin by closing your eyes and mouth. Inhale 4 counts in through your nose and exhale very slowly 8 counts out your nose. Do this 10 times. If you do not begin to feel your body and mind relaxing, repeat 10 times again. Breathing like this stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) and it is what tells our bodies to rest and digest. The PNS tells your body that it is ok to relax, feel peaceful and that you are not running from a tiger anymore. This breathing tool helps slow down respiration, heart rate, and tells your body to conserve energy and to become less tense and anxious. This is also an immensely powerful tool but should only be used at bedtime.