



Brain Breaks: Breathing Exercises



Back to School
Toolkit

MEDICAL DISCLAIMER

Not all exercises are suitable for everyone and it is recommended that you consult your doctor before beginning this or any exercise program. To reduce the risk of injury, never force or strain or attempt these exercises without the assistance of a trained yoga instructor. If you experience pain or discomfort during this exercise, stop immediately and consult your doctor. The instruction presented is in no way intended as a substitute for medical advice.

BREATHING EXERCISES

Breathing exercises encourage students to gain control of their breath and body. Our breath is directly related to the activity of our parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems. The brain adjusts the breath to prepare us for an anticipated response. This unconscious reaction can increase stress or decrease energy, which may prevent us from achieving what we want.

Conscious breathing allows students to practice awareness of when they are or are not using the breath adaptively, and gives them the tools they need to adjust their breathing to be more effective. Conscious breathing is a powerful practice to bring into the classroom. By releasing tension and increasing focus, conscious breathing creates space for your students - and you - to become present and engaged.

Breathing techniques can help students consciously and constructively respond to challenging situations. Just a little bit of breathing instruction can have remarkable results. A recent study found that students who went through a four-week school program that introduced yoga-based breathing practices felt less impulsive and more in control over their actions than control groups (Wheeler, 2013).

Our breathing exercises include strong visual and auditory components so all breathing exercises are done sitting up tall, cross-legged or kneeling on the shins and heels unless otherwise indicated.

If students feel restricted or experience difficulty breathing, allow them to breathe through the mouth.

CALMING

BALLOON BREATH

Benefit:

- Relieves symptoms of stress
- Triggers the relaxation response

Instructions:

1. Begin seated in your chair. Make sure both feet are touching the floor and you are sitting up tall in your body.
2. Place one or both hands on your belly and breathe deeply. Inhale, feeling your belly rise.
3. Exhale, feeling your belly lower and contract.



Teaching Notes:

Invite students to imagine their belly like a balloon. As they breathe in, they blow their balloon up into their hands. As they breathe out, they deflate their balloon away from their hands. Invite children to imagine the color of their balloon.

COMPLETE BREATH

Benefit:

- Interrupts the body's stress response
- Triggers the body's relaxation response
- Relieves symptoms of stress

Instructions:

1. Begin seated in your chair. Make sure both feet are touching the floor and you are sitting up tall in your body. Place right hand over your heart and your left hand onto your belly.
2. Breathe in slowly through your nose filling your belly first, then your ribs, then your chest.
3. Pause.
4. Exhale slowly out of your nose from your upper chest first, then your rib cage, then your belly.



OCEAN BREATH

Benefit:

- Calms the mind
- Releases tension in the neck and lower face

Instructions:

1. Begin seated in your chair. Make sure both feet are touching the floor and you are sitting up tall in your body.
1. Inhale through your nose.
2. Exhale, open your mouth “hahhh,” making the sound of an ocean wave.



HUMMING BREATH

Benefit:

- Focuses the mind
- Increases relaxation

Instructions:

1. Begin seated in your chair. Make sure both feet are touching the floor and you are sitting up tall in your body.
2. Inhale through your nose.
3. Exhale, making the sound “hmmm” like the sound of a bee.



STIMULATING

JOY BREATH

Benefit:

- Awakens the body
- Increases oxygen levels
- Releases tension

Instructions:

1. Begin seated in your chair. Make sure both feet are touching the floor and you are sitting up tall in your body.
2. Inhale, reach your arms up and overhead.
3. Exhale, lowering your arms to chest level.
4. Inhale, opening your arms to the side.
5. Exhale, bringing your arms back to the middle.
6. Inhale, reach your arms up and overhead.
7. Exhale strongly and sharply with a “HAAAH” sound, swing your arms down and behind you.
8. Repeat three to five times.
9. Rest and notice how you feel.



Joy Breath 1



Joy Breath 2



Joy Breath 3



Joy Breath 4



Joy Breath 5



Joy Breath 6

YOGA ed.