

1. Sama Vritti or “Equal Breathing”

How it’s done: Balance can do a body good, beginning with the [breath](#). To start, inhale for a count of four, then exhale for a count of four — all through the nose, which adds a natural resistance to the breath. Got the basic [pranayama](#) down? More advanced yogis can aim for six to eight counts per breath with the same goal in mind: calm the nervous system, increase focus and reduce stress, Pacheco says.

When it works best: Anytime, anyplace — but this is one technique that’s especially effective before bed. “Similar to counting sheep,” Pacheco says, “if you’re having trouble falling asleep, this breath can help take your mind off the racing thoughts, or whatever might be distracting you from sleep.”

Level of difficulty: Beginner

2. Abdominal Breathing Technique

How it’s done: With one hand on the chest and the other on the belly, take a deep breath in through the nose, ensuring the diaphragm (not the chest) inflates with enough air to create a stretch in the lungs. The goal: Six to 10 deep, slow breaths per minute for 10 minutes each day to experience immediate reductions to heart rate and blood pressure, McConnell says. Keep at it for six to eight weeks, and those benefits might stick around even longer.

When it works best: Before an exam, or any stressful event. But keep in mind, “Those who operate in a stressed state all the time might be a little shocked how hard it is to control the breath,” Pacheco says. To help train the breath, consider biofeedback tools such as McConnell’s [Breathe Strong app](#), which can help users pace their breathing wherever they are.

Level of difficulty: Beginner

3. Nadi Shodhana or “Alternate Nostril Breathing”

How it’s done: A yogi’s best friend, this breath is said to bring calm and balance, and unite the right and left [sides of the brain](#). Starting in a comfortable meditative pose, hold the right thumb over the right nostril and inhale deeply through the left nostril. At the peak of inhalation, close off the left nostril with the ring finger, then exhale through the right nostril. Continue the pattern, inhaling through the right nostril, closing it off with the right thumb and exhaling through the left nostril.

When it works best: Crunch time, or whenever it’s time to focus or energize. Just don’t try this one before bed: Nadi shodhana is said to “[clear the channels](#)” and make people feel more awake. “It’s almost like a cup of coffee,” Pacheco says.

Level of difficulty: Intermediate

4. Kapalabhati or “Skull Shining Breath”

How it’s done: Ready to brighten up your day from the inside out? This one begins with a [long, slow inhale](#), followed by a quick, powerful exhale generated from the lower belly. Once comfortable with the contraction, up the pace to one inhale-exhale (all through the nose) every one to two seconds, for a total of 10 breaths.

When it works best: When it’s time to wake up, warm up or start looking on the brighter side of things. “It’s pretty abdominal-intensive,” Pacheco says, “but it will warm up the body, shake off stale energy and wake up the brain.” If alternate nostril breathing is like coffee, consider this a shot of espresso, she says.

Level of difficulty: Advanced

5. Progressive Relaxation

How it's done: To nix [tension](#) from head to toe, close the eyes and focus on [tensing and relaxing](#) each muscle group for two to three seconds each. Start with the feet and toes, then move up to the knees, thighs, rear, chest, arms, hands, neck, jaw and eyes — all while maintaining deep, slow breaths. Having trouble staying on track? Anxiety and panic specialist [Dr. Patricia Farrell](#) suggests we breathe in through the nose, [hold for a count of five](#) while the muscles tense, then breathe out through the mouth on release.

When it works best: At home, at a desk or even on the road. One word of caution: Dizziness is never the goal. If holding the breath ever feels uncomfortable, tone it down to just a few seconds at most.

Level of difficulty: Beginner

6. Guided Visualization

How it's done: Head straight for that “[happy place](#),” no questions asked. With a coach, therapist or helpful recording as your guide, breathe deeply while focusing on pleasant, [positive images](#) to replace any negative thoughts. Psychologist Dr. Ellen Langer explains that while it's just one means of achieving mindfulness, “Guided visualization helps puts you in the place you want to be, rather than letting your mind go to the internal dialogue that is stressful.”


When it works best: Pretty much anyplace you can safely close your eyes and [let go](#) (e.g. *not* at the wheel of a car).

Level of difficulty: Intermediate

While stress, frustration, and other daily setbacks will always be there, the good news is, so will our breath.

This article has been read and approved by Greatist Experts [Dr. Ellen Langer](#) and [Rebecca Pacheco](#).

Do you use breath as a way to relax? Tell us in the comments below, or tweet the author at [@jshakeshaft](#).

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