



Breathe Easy

CHALLENGE

Practice breathing to improve your health

Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read “Breathe Easy.”
2. Practice breathing to improve your health.
3. Keep a record of your completed health challenge in case your organization requires documentation.



As the CEO of a fast-growing kitchen appliance company, Shae Hong had a lot on his mind.¹

His to-do list looked something like this. Navigate traffic in Los Angeles, Calif., to company headquarters. Improve delivery and distribution to retailers and customers.

Oversee product development. Fine tune the supply chain. Provide a positive experience for customers, even when something goes wrong. Keep shareholders happy.

And there was at least one more thing for Hong to do. Beat the previous year’s annual revenue of \$21 million. Every day was stressful, and it wasn’t getting any better.

For Hong, work was taking a toll on his health, his happiness, and his productivity. And he knew he needed to do something about it. Sound familiar?

Here’s what he did. He looked over his daily schedule and planned out three 15-minute breaks a day. But it wasn’t to wash down a donut with another cup of coffee. He shut his office door. He hung up a do-not-disturb sign. And for those 15 minutes, he sat quietly...breathing.

It took some practice to get comfortable with the routine. But after a while, he noticed a difference. He felt better. He had more energy And it made his to-do list a lot easier to manage.

“Remembering to breathe slowly keeps me patient and better able to think through problems and find a resolution,” says Hong.

Want to reduce stress and improve your health in just a few minutes a day? Take the month-long health challenge to *Breathe Easy*.

How much do you know about the benefits of mindful breathing? Take the quiz to find out:

- | | T | F |
|----|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

How did you do? If you answered any of these statements incorrectly, you could benefit from learning more about mindful breathing to improve your health. It only takes about 10 minutes of quiet breathing to reduce stress and improve your mood. (If you can’t take a 10-minute break, start with 2 or 3 minutes.) Stressed out? Stop. Find a quiet place. Take a few minutes to practice mindful breathing, and you’ll feel better.⁷

Answers: 1. False. 2. True. 3. True. 4. True. 5. True.

The Health Benefits of Mindful Breathing

At first, it was hard for Hong to clear his mind and focus on breathing during a 15-minute break. (If you’re stressed out, you probably have a lot on your mind, too.)

But he persisted, and it got easier. He felt better. His blood pressure went down. Cravings for food or alcohol became easier to manage. Happiness and productivity increased by simply taking a little time each day to breathe.

Research shows mindful breathing can also help:

- Reduce cortisol levels linked to stress, inflammation, and chronic disease²
- Treat depression and anxiety to improve mood³
- Increase energy and happiness
- Lower blood pressure without medication⁴
- Control impulsive behavior
- Improve quality of sleep⁵
- Strengthen the immune system to fight cold and flu viruses⁶
- Improve brain function, thinking, and problem solving

Infographic:
The scientific benefits of breathing + 6-step breathing technique
<https://tinyurl.com/y9ajkliv>

Do you take time to breathe?

Most people don't, says Stanford University researcher Dr. Emma Seppälä. She's the author of the book, *The Happiness Track*, a frequent TED Talks speaker, and director of Stanford's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education. And she helps people learn to use breathing to reduce stress, improve health, and increase happiness.

When you're stressed out and you've got a million things to do at home or at work, it's easy to think you don't have time for mindful breathing. But before you rush off to the next thing on your to-do list, give it a try.

"Breathing is the single most important act that we do every day," says Seppälä. "Daily breathing practices activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which is associated with resting and digesting, and a more peaceful mind and body."

VIDEO: 'Breathing happiness' with 4-count breathing technique by Dr. Emma Seppälä
tinyurl.com/jhowvld

7 Steps to Breathe Easy

Want to learn how to breathe easy to improve your health? Here's one easy-to-follow breathing practice you can use. Follow these seven steps:

- 1. Create a breathing practice.** Set aside 10 to 15 minutes each day to breathe. Schedule it just like you would an important meeting.
- 2. Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed.** Close your office or bedroom door. Go to your car. Sit on a bench in a quiet area of a park.
- 3. Set a timer.** Start with 10 minutes. As you get comfortable with breathing, increase the time to 15 or 20 minutes.
- 4. Sit comfortably,** and place one hand on your stomach.
- 5. Breathe in through your nose.** Inhale deeply and slowly. Pay attention to your chest rising as your lungs fill with air. Focus on your breathing, and try not to think about anything else.
- 6. Exhale through your mouth.** Tighten your stomach muscles, and try to push out as much air as possible.
- 7. Repeat** the process until time's up.

This is just one example of a breathing exercise you can use to reduce stress and feel better. But it's not the only way to use breathing to improve your health. It's a way to help you get started, create a daily breathing practice, and be more mindful about your health, happiness, and lifestyle choices. Want to be healthier and happier? *Breathe Easy*.

Create a routine:
Relaxation techniques to reduce stress
tinyurl.com/yaxcdkzu

References

- Hong, S. (2015). How one CEO is using meditation to relieve stress. *Chief Executive*. From: <https://tinyurl.com/ycdme3x3>
- Xiao, M., et al. (2017). The effects of diaphragmatic breathing on attention, negative affect and stress in healthy adults. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8:874. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00874
- Sharma, A., et al. (2016). A breathing-based meditation intervention for patients with major depressive disorder following inadequate response to antidepressants: A randomized pilot study. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 78(1):59-63. From: <https://tinyurl.com/yc4737kq>
- Grossman, E., et al. (2001). Effectiveness of deep breathing exercise on blood pressure among patients with hypertension. *International Journal of Pharma and Bio Sciences*, 8(1):256-260. From: <https://tinyurl.com/yc5s8h5o>
- National Institutes of Health. (2017). Insomnia: Relaxation technique and sleeping habits. Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care. From: <https://tinyurl.com/ycpsdm7o>
- Matthijs, K., et al. (2014). Voluntary activation of the sympathetic nervous system and attenuation of the innate immune response in humans. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111: (20):7379-7384. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1322174111>
- Harvard University. (2009). Relaxation techniques: Breath control helps quell errant stress response. Harvard Health Publishing. From: <https://tinyurl.com/yaxcdkzu>





Breathe Easy

CHALLENGE

Practice breathing to improve your health

Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, or add to your digital calendar).
2. Aim to practice breathing to improve your health daily. Find a time that works best for you.
3. Use the calendar to record your actions and choices to practice breathing to improve your health.
4. Review your progress at the end of each day, week, and at the end of the month. Then keep up the practice for a lifetime of best health.

MONTH: _____							HC = Health Challenge™ ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary
HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	
HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	
HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	
HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	
HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	

_____ Number of days this month I practiced breathing to improve my health

_____ Number of days this month I exercised at least 30 minutes

Other wellness projects completed this month:

Name _____ Date _____