

# Preparatory Breathing Exercises

The following exercises are inspired by exercises from yoga and breathing therapy and take about 10 minutes. These exercises help release and engage the diaphragm. Do these at least once but preferably twice a day for the next two weeks. You can select either the floor or chair exercise or do both. You can include beach pose breathing after the first week.

## Exercises on the floor

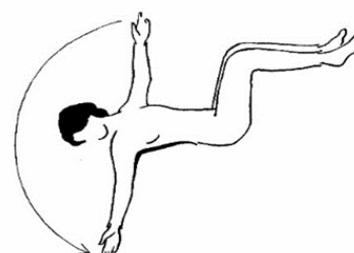
Rate your current stress level. Lie down on the floor. If you are more comfortable with a thin cushion under your head, that's fine. Notice where your breathing creates movement: in your abdomen, in your low rib cage (flanks), in your chest, in your back?

Stretch your arms upwards along your ears and stretch your toes forward, allowing your body to be as long as it can be. Press your back flat against the floor. Hold this position for some time. Release and direct your attention to the movement of your breathing. Feel each inhalation and exhalation, as they follow each other. Follow the breathing without changing anything. Do this for a couple of minutes.

Stretch your arms sideways and bend your knees, keeping your feet flat on the floor. Breathe in and turn your knees to the right on the exhalation. Turn the knees to the centre position at the inhalation. At the next exhalation turn your knees to the left and at the inhalation turn the knees back to the centre position. Repeat this movement from left to right, guided by your breathing. Choose a pace that feels comfortable. Do this for a couple of minutes.

Keep your knees bend and turn onto your left side. Stretch your arms forward. With your right arm, draw a semi-circle through the air at a slow pace until your arm lies on the floor. Turn your head at the same time to the right so that your eyes keep following your fingers during making of the circle. Repeat several times at a slow pace. Then turn onto your right side and do this exercise with your left arm. Repeat several times.

Finally, turn on your back again. Place your fingers around your belly button, with the tops of your index fingers and thumbs against each other. Focus your attention on your fingers and notice that your fingers separate from each other slightly during inhalation and touch again after exhalation. If thoughts distract you, allow your attention to return to your fingers. Do not judge. Continue for as long as it feels comfortable and relaxing.



Rate your current stress level and notice where your breathing creates movement: in your abdomen, in your low rib cage (flanks), in your chest, in your back?

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## Exercises while sitting on a chair

Sit on a chair with your back straight and your feet are flat on the floor. Keep your head in an upright position like there is a string attached to the top of your head pulling your head to the ceiling. Your back, neck and head are in one straight line. Keep your chin slightly retracted. Your hands lie on your lap. Place your feet right under your knees. Your feet point straight forward. Rate your current stress level. Notice where your breathing creates movement: in your abdomen, in your flanks, in our chest, in your back?

Fold your hands together. While inhaling gently press the fingertips of your right hand against the back of your left hand. Release the pressure during exhalation. Repeat several times. Then, while inhaling gently press the fingertips of your left hand against the back of your right hand. Release the pressure during exhalation. Repeat several times.

Finally, complete the exercise by pressing the fingertips of both hands on the back of your hands during inhalation. Let go of the pressure during exhalation. Make sure that the movement of your fingertips is small and gentle, performed with attention.

Place your hands on your upper legs. Breathe in gently while pressing your feet against the ground at the same time. Feel how the thighs tighten a bit. Release the tension in your feet and legs while exhaling. Repeat several times. Then, breathe in gently with relaxed feet and legs and breathe out gently while pressing your feet against the floor. Feel how the thighs tighten a bit during exhalation. Breathe in again and let go of the tension in the feet and legs. Repeat several times.

Move slightly forward to sit on the edge of the chair. Put both hands on the belly with the fingertips just below the belly button. Focus your attention on your fingertips and notice if your fingers move slightly forward during inhalation. Then breathe out again and notice if there is less pressure on your fingertips. If thoughts distract you, try to get your attention back to your fingers. Do not judge. Continue for as long as it feels comfortable and relaxing.

Rate your current stress level and notice where your breathing creates movement: in your abdomen, in your flanks, in your chest, in your back?

## Beach pose to help engage the diaphragm

To facilitate diaphragmatic breathing, you can adopt the “beach pose” (Bradley, 2012). The beach pose helps fix the upper chest and secondary breathing muscles, allowing the diaphragm to move freely.

- Lie down with a few pillows propped up behind your back and head
- Bend your knees keeping your feet flat on the floor / bed
- Interlace your hands behind your head (like when you are relaxing on the beach).

# Preparatory Breathing Exercises

Breathe at a slow pace that feels comfortable, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your nose or through pursed lips (which helps slow down the exhale). Pursed-lip breathing means pursing your lips when you exhale, like you blowing through a straw or as if you are about to whistle. You can slowly roll both knees together, from side to side, to switch off tension in the abdominal area.

Aim to adopt a diaphragmatic breathing pattern so that during the inhale:

- The first movement begins in your diaphragm around the bottom of your ribs (not in your abdominal area). Your mid to lower ribs expand sideways.
- Your chest slowly expands, following the movement in your lower ribcage.
- Your abdomen rises passively, following the movement in your lower ribcage.
- Your shoulders stay still (as your secondary breathing muscles in your upper chest, back and shoulders should not be deployed during rest).