

The Breath by Rebecca Morgan-Jones

Did you know, the way we breathe has a massive impact on the way we feel? Do you ever notice that when you are nervous, scared or worried about something it can change the way you breathe?

Often when we are calm, we breathe right down into the tummy, but when we are feeling an emotion like worry, we can shallow breathe into the chest and through the mouth. When we breathe like this, the brain responds by thinking we are in danger, which then reinforces the breath and it can become a cycle. If we can learn to calm the breath and breathe in different ways, we can have a massive impact on our mental and physical wellbeing.

We breathe about 17,000 times a day, so it's worth making sure that the majority of your breaths are good ones! The breath is amazing as it can help us feel fantastic and it's all for free!

When we were babies, we used to breathe right into our tummies at all times, and this is the way, as humans, nature intended for us to breathe.

We should inhale and fill the chest, lungs, tummy with breath and exhale from these three areas and so on. When we breathe like this, the brain responds by thinking everything is ok.

When you next feel nervous, try to notice what happens to your breath. Remember we are all the same, it's just our body doing its job. Our body is trying to keep us safe. When we 'shallow breathe' the brain responds by thinking something is wrong. This increases adrenaline in our bodies which increases the feeling of unrest.

Many of us are feeling anxious at the moment, especially as lockdown is starting to ease and we are able to go and do some activities. It is totally normal if you are feeling apprehensive about this, as it's a time of adjustment.

So, the great news is we can help our bodies and minds by breathing well. This may sound silly, as you may be thinking, "I can breathe, I'm alive". But, to breathe well can have a massive impact on so many things. It can help us sleep, stay calm, feel relaxed and focused.

Things to try

Here are some ideas on how to breathe well. You may want to try some!

Consciously breathe deeply a few times every day. Just shut your eyes, relax your jaw, shoulders, hands and tongue, and just breathe. Breathe in any way that makes you feel good. This is beneficial as it resets us and makes us feel calm and energised.

Nose breathing is a much calmer way to breathe than mouth breathing. So, try and consciously breathe from the nose if you are feeling worried or stressed. Often, we use the mouth to breathe when we are nervous. The mouth is great to use to sigh from when we are needing to release tension. Try breathing through the nose and sighing out of the mouth.

Belly (diaphragmatic) breathing - this can help us feel calmer, less stressed or less nervous. It's also a great breath for everyone to do throughout the day, as it refuels and calms the body and brain. Try it at school when you need a rest, or you are feeling tired. It is better to breathe for 5 minutes than grab some sugar to give you energy. Just stop, place your hand on your tummy and check if you're breathing into the tummy rather than the chest.

It's worth saying that some of these techniques may not make you feel exactly what I have said. You may love some of them and really dislike others. That's fine, just have a go and see which work for you! ***Most importantly, enjoy.***

Author profile: Rebecca has worked in education for nearly 20 years, starting off her career in a Fresh Start school in the city of Nottingham and soon taking over the position of Head of Art at Toot Hill School. Rebecca moved on from middle leadership to join the Associate School Leader team, where she was responsible for delivering training such as middle leadership courses, coordinating programmes including those for trainee teachers, NQTs and RQTs. Currently, Rebecca is a system support leader for Nova Education Trust and member of the Well-Being Working Group. Rebecca is passionate about people and working to supporting them in their career. Making sure teachers are happy and they truly enjoy coming to work is her real driver. This passion led her to train to be a mind-set coach. When she's not working in an educational setting, Rebecca delivers training to various schools, corporate settings and individuals on mind-set and being conscious about the way we think. Rebecca is also a qualified yoga and meditation instructor; she has written and delivered wellness days and high-end yoga retreats.