

# Breaths That Work

## STRAW BREATHING

### GUIDE

By

Stress Straws

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Breath work uses deep breathing exercises to help heal your mind and body.





A straw effortlessly doubles the length of your exhale, promoting diaphragmatic breathing through long and slow deep breaths.

# The Science of Straw Breathing

Breathing connects the brain and body.

When we are stressed, the "fight or flight" response is activated with short and shallow breaths.

We can override this reflex with long and slow deep breaths that signals our nervous system to rest and relax.

When we control our breath, we can control our health.

Let's explore some breathing exercises using Stress Straws™

# Other Ways To Slow Your Exhale

Pursed Lip Breathing (PLB)– Pucker your lips and exhale slowly through pursed lips like blowing on hot soup.

Tongue Placement– Make an "S" sound or place tongue on roof of mouth and force air out around sides.

Breath Through Fist– Gently exhale through a lightly closed fist.

While all these techniques slow your exhale, they:

- 1) Remove focus away from your breath
- 2) Create tension within your jaw, fist, tongue or lips
- 3) Provide inconsistency resistance and airflow

# Straw Breathing

## Tips & Tricks

- A Whistling Noise Means You May Be Blowing Rather Than Exhaling Through The Straw. Do NOT purse lips around straw
  - Straw should be placed between gently closed and flat lipsNaturally pause on inhale and exhale
- Relax Jaw and Shoulders
- If Necessary, Place Tongue On Straw Opening During Inhale
- Listen To Your Body And Do What Feels Good
  - Use A Count Time That Feels Good
  - Counts should be used as a ratio
- Before Starting, Breathe Normally For A Few Minutes To Get A Benchmark Of Your Normal Breathing Cycle
- Breathwork is a process that works best as part of a mindfulness practice that includes proper diet, exercise and meditation.

# Breaths That Work™

## Exercises For:

- Stress (pg. 1)
- Anxiety and Depression (pg. 2)
- Meditation (pg. 3)
- Sleeping (pg. 4)
- Children (pg. 5)
- Addiction Withdrawal (pg. 6)
- Lungs and Digestion (pg. 7)
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- PTSD (pg. 9)
- Chronic Pain (pg. 10)
- Anger (pg. 11)
- Productivity (pg. 12)





# Straw Breathing For Stress Relief

According to a 2017 study, "the use of deep breathing techniques has lead to an effective improvement in the management of stress in daily life."

Technique: 2-to-1 Breathing

Uses: To overcome the "fight or flight" response activated when stressed.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Inhale deeply through the nose.

Step 3) Gently exhale through straw until lungs are completely empty.

Step 4) Repeat this breathing cycle until calm.

TIP: If necessary, place tongue on straw end to inhale only through the nose.

TIP: Aim for an exhale twice as long as your inhale of 8-12 seconds.

Perciavalle V, Blandini M, Fecarotta P, Buscemi A, Di Corrado D, Bertolo L, Fichera F, Coco M. The role of deep breathing on stress. *Neurol Sci.* 2017 Mar;38(3):451-458. doi: 10.1007/s10072-016-2790-8. Epub 2016 Dec 19. PMID: 27995346.

# Straw Breathing For Anxiety And Depression

A 2005 series of papers found evidence that breathing exercises could help manage anxiety and depression.

## Technique: Breath Counting

Uses: To help calm your nerves and mind when feeling anxious or sad.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Inhale deeply through the nose.

Step 4) Gently exhale through the straw until lungs are completely empty.

Step 5) Pause and count, "one".

Step 6) Repeat breathing cycle and count, "two".

Step 7) Repeat breathing cycle counting up to 10.

TIP: To prevent whistling noise, Do NOT purse lips around straw.

TIP: Relax All Facial Features Including Jaw and Shoulders.

Brown RP, Gerbarg PL. Sudarshan Kriya yogic breathing in the treatment of stress, anxiety, and depression: part I-neurophysiologic model. *J Altern Complement Med.* 2005;11(1):189-201.

Brown RP, Gerbarg PL. Sudarshan Kriya Yogic breathing in the treatment of stress, anxiety, and depression. Part II—clinical applications and guidelines. *J Altern Complement Med.* 2005;11(4):711-717.00

# Straw Breathing For Meditation

According to a study in the Journal of Neurophysiology, "paying attention to our breath may activate regions of our brain associated with emotion, attention and awareness."

## Technique: Mantra Breathing

Uses: To quiet and focus your mind on a positive trigger word such as "love", "relaxation" or "healing".

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Inhale deeply through the nose while thinking of a positive trigger word.

Step 3) Gently exhale through straw while thinking the trigger word until lungs are completely empty.

Step 4) Repeat this breathing cycle everyday.

TIP: Other terms for "trigger word" can be "intention" or "mantra". Use only positive words or phrases.

TIP: Refocus any wandering thoughts by constantly repeating and returning to your trigger word.

Herrero JL, Khuvis S, Yeagle E, Cerf M, Mehta AD. Breathing above the brain stem: volitional control and attentional modulation in humans. *Journal of Neurophysiology*. 2018 Jan 1;119(1):145-159. doi: 10.1152/jn.00551.2017. Epub 2017 Sep 27. PMID: 28954895; PMCID: PMC5866472.

# Straw Breathing For Sleeping

A 2019 study believes, "slow breathing techniques in adjunct to relaxation techniques and sleep hygiene may be a more powerful tool in combating insomnia than the prevailing method of using hypnotics and other pharmaceutical interventions."

Technique: 4-7-8 Breathing

Uses: To help insomnia and restlessness by quieting mind.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Gently close eyes.

Step 3) Inhale deeply through the nose counting to 4.

Step 4) Pause and hold for 7 counts.

Step 5) Gently exhale through the straw for 8 counts.

Step 6) Repeat this breathing cycle until asleep.

TIP: Breath counts are approximations. Use breath counts most comfortable while focusing on the ratio of a short inhale with longer exhale.

Jerath, Ravinder et al. "Self-Regulation of Breathing as an Adjunctive Treatment of Insomnia." *Frontiers in psychiatry* vol. 9 780. 29 Jan. 2019, doi:10.3389/fpsyt.2018.00780



# Straw Breathing For Children

A 2020 study found that breathing exercises as part of a mindfulness practice, "taught the students to take a moment to stop and breathe. This reduced impulsiveness and allowed them to make better decisions."

## Technique: Bee Breathing

Uses: To help children with ASD, ADHD, or OCD slow down and focus better.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Inhale deeply through the nose.

Step 3) Gently exhale through the straw while making a deep buzzing sound by humming the letters ZZZZZZ.

Step 4) Repeat this breathing cycle until calm.

TIP: Humming takes advantage of the vibrational energy of mantra chants such as "Om".

Juliano AC, Alexander AO, DeLuca J, Genova H. Feasibility of a school-based mindfulness program for improving inhibitory skills in children with autism spectrum disorder. Res Dev Disabil. 2020 Jun;101:103641. doi: 10.1016/j.ridd.2020.103641. Epub 2020 Apr 18. PMID: 32315929.

# Straw Breathing For Addiction Withdrawal

A 2004 study on addictive behaviors found that, "controlled deep breathing significantly reduced smoking withdrawal symptoms."

## Technique: Mouth Breathing

Uses: To mimic the pull of inhaling smoke and replace the oral fixation of smoking and vaping.

Step 1) Hold straw between fingers.

Step 2) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 3) Inhale deeply through mouth using the straw.

Step 4) Exhale through the straw as if blowing out smoke.

Step 5) Repeat this breathing cycle 10 times.

TIP: Use during smoking activities such as while driving, drinking or during breaks.

TIP: Straws may also be chewed on to help alleviate withdrawal symptoms.

McClernon FJ, Westman EC, Rose JE. The effects of controlled deep breathing on smoking withdrawal symptoms in dependent smokers. *Addict Behav.* 2004 Jun;29(4):765-72. doi: 10.1016/j.addbeh.2004.02.005. PMID: 15135559.

# Straw Breathing For Lungs and Digestion

A 2009 study found evidence that diaphragmatic breathing improved the quality of life for patients with asthma.

Technique: Belly/Diaphragmatic Breathing

Uses: To aid lung and digestive issues.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly just below your ribs.

Step 3) Inhale through your nose feeling the hand on your belly rise as your stomach expands with air.

Step 4) Exhale through the straw feeling your hand fall as your belly deflates.

Step 5) Repeat this breathing cycle as recommended.

TIP: The hand on your chest should not move.

Prem V, Sahoo RC, Adhikari P. Effect of diaphragmatic breathing exercise on quality of life in subjects with asthma: A systematic review. *Physiother Theory Pract.* 2013;29(4):271-277.

“Diaphragmatic Breathing for GI Patients.” *Diaphragmatic Breathing for GI Patients | Michigan Medicine*,  
[www.uofmhealth.org/conditions-treatments/diaphragmatic-breathing-gi-patients](http://www.uofmhealth.org/conditions-treatments/diaphragmatic-breathing-gi-patients).

# Straw Breathing For Hypertension

A scientific statement From the American Heart Association claims, "a short period of deep breathing has been shown to reduce systolic blood pressure"

Technique: Resonant or Coherent Breathing

Uses: To stimulate the vagus nerve to slow your heart beat and lower blood pressure.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips

Step 2) Inhale deeply through the nose for 4 counts

Step 3) Gently exhale through the straw for 4 counts

Step 4) Repeat using a 5 count inhale and exhale

Step 6) Repeat using a 6 count inhale and exhale

Step 7) Repeat 4-5-6 breathing cycle for 5 minutes

TIP: Use a count length with a equal  
inhale and exhale that feels most  
comfortable for you

Brook RD, Appel LJ, Rubenfire M, Ogedegbe G, Bisognano JD, Elliott WJ, Fuchs FD, Hughes JW, Lackland DT, Staffileno BA, Townsend RR, Rajagopalan S; American Heart Association Professional Education Committee of the Council for High Blood Pressure Research, Council on Cardiovascular and Stroke Nursing, Council on Epidemiology and Prevention, and Council on Nutrition, Physical Activity. Beyond medications and diet: alternative approaches to lowering blood pressure: a scientific statement from the american heart association. Hypertension. 2013 Jun;61(6):1360-83. doi: 10.1161/HYP.0b013e318293645f. Epub 2013 Apr 22. PMID: 23608661.



# Straw Breathing For PTSD

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs says deep breathing, "can be especially helpful to Veterans and civilians who've experienced traumatic events."

Technique: Focused Breathing

Uses: To bring awareness to your breath to help aid in the treatment of psychological conditions such as depression, trauma, OCD, ASD and ADHD.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Inhale deeply through the nose.

Step 3) Pause and naturally hold.

Step 3) Gently exhale through straw until lungs are completely empty.

Step 4) Pause and hold until your body wants to naturally inhale.

Step 5) Repeat this breathing cycle until calm.

TIP: Become aware and focus on the stillness during the two pauses.

VA, US. "Veterans Affairs." *United States Department of Veterans Affairs*, Aetna Inc., 19 May 2014, [www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em\\_eap\\_exercise\\_breathing.asp](http://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em_eap_exercise_breathing.asp).

# Straw Breathing For Chronic Pain

A 2012 article suggests, "that the way of breathing decisively influences autonomic and pain processing."

Technique: Body Scan Breathing

Uses: To connect the mind and body through breath awareness.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Comfortably sit up tall or lie down.

Step 3) Inhale through the nose and start scanning the body.

Step 4) Slowly exhale through the straw noticing how each part of the body feels.

Step 5) Repeat this breathing cycle as you scan each part of the body.

TIP: Move your awareness from the feet to the legs, stomach, back, shoulders, hands, arms, neck and head.

TIP: Stop and acknowledge any sensations within the body. Try to breath away any tension or pain.

Busch V, Magerl W, Kern U, Haas J, Hajak G, Eichhammer P. The effect of deep and slow breathing on pain perception, autonomic activity, and mood processing—an experimental study. *Pain Med.* 2012;13(2):215-228.

# Straw Breathing For Anger

In a 2016 study on anger management, "the investigator felt that deep breathing exercise should be taught to decrease the anger expression."

Technique: Box/Square Breathing

Uses: To help you take a moment to think more clearly in order to respond rather than react when angry.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Inhale through the nose for a count of 4.

Step 3) Pause and hold for a count of 4.

Step 4) Slowly exhale through the straw for a count of 4.

Step 5) Pause and hold for a count of 4.

Step 6) Repeat this breathing cycle until anger has subsided

TIP: Any count length with equal sequences can be used.

Priyanka, K. "A Study to Assess the Effectiveness of Deep Breathing Exercise on Reduction of Anger Expression among Adolescent Girls in Selected School at Vallioor." *EPrints@Tamil Nadu Dr MGR Medical University*, 1 Oct. 2016, repository-tnmgrmu.ac.in/10031/.

# Straw Breathing For Productivity

A 2014 study on fast breathing techniques determined the positive "effects on executive function of manipulation in auditory working memory, central neural processing and sensory-motor performance."

Technique: Breath of Fire Breathing

Uses: To help you become more energized and focused to improve concentration.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Inhale and exhale rapidly through the mouth using the straw.

Step 3) Do this rapid mouth breathing for 1 minute.

Step 4) Take a few normal breaths before repeating this cycle until alert.

TIP: Try contracting your abdominal muscles

TIP: This rapid breathing rhythm is similar to panting like a dog

Busch V, Magerl W, Kern U, Haas J, Hajak G, Eichhammer P. The effect of deep and slow breathing on pain perception, autonomic activity, and mood processing—an experimental study. *Pain Med.* 2012;13(2):215-228.



# Straw Breathing For Yoga

Yoga- Pranayama, or yoga breathing, was found to have many influences over the mind and body in a 2018 study.

Uses: To aid in breath work during Yoga sessions to allow you to better focus on your movements and positions.

- 1) Place straw between lightly closed flat lips
- 2) Inhale deeply through only the nose at the beginning of an asana
- 3) Gently exhale through straw while remaining in the position
- 4) Repeat this breathing Cycle as you move through each position

TIP: The term "trigger word" may also be called an intention or mantra. Use only positive phrases.

TIP: Refocus any wandering thoughts by constantly returning to your trigger word

Herrero JL, Khuvis S, Yeagle E, Cerf M, Mehta AD. Breathing above the brain stem: volitional control and attentional modulation in humans. *Journal of Neurophysiology*. 2018 Jan 1;119(1):145-159. doi: 10.1152/jn.00551.2017. Epub 2017 Sep 27. PMID: 28954895; PMCID: PMC5866472.

# Straw Breathing For Digestion

The University of Michigan Medicine states, "while diaphragmatic breathing, you are facilitating the activation of the parasympathetic system, which can be thought of as the relaxation response of the body or the "rest and digest" state."

## Technique: Belly Breathing

Uses: To help reduce abdominal pain, upset stomach, constipation, bloating and diarrhea.

- 1) Place straw between lightly closed flat lips
- 2) Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly just below your rib cage
- 3) Inhale through your nose feeling your hand rising as your stomach expands with air
- 4) Exhale through the straw feeling your hand fall as your belly deflates
- 5) Repeat this breathing cycle as recommended

TIP: The hand on your chest should not move

"Diaphragmatic Breathing for GI Patients." *Diaphragmatic Breathing for GI Patients* | Michigan Medicine,  
[www.uofmhealth.org/conditions-treatments/diaphragmatic-breathing-gi-patients](http://www.uofmhealth.org/conditions-treatments/diaphragmatic-breathing-gi-patients).

# Bonus Exercises

## Breaths That Work <sup>TM</sup> For:

- Joy (pg. 1)
- Concentration (pg. 2)
- Mindfulness (pg. 3)
- Restlessness (pg. 4)
- Stretching (pg. 5)
- Creativity (pg. 6)



# Straw Breathing For Joy

Benefit: "A lovingkindness meditation course also increased participants' daily experience of joy, gratitude and hope- the more they meditated, the better they felt." <sup>1</sup>

Technique: Compassionate Breathing

Uses: To cultivate a state of love and compassion for yourself and others.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Place one hand on your heart and one on your lungs.

Step 3) Inhale deeply through the nose imagining your heart and lungs filling with love for yourself.

Step 4) Release this compassionate energy by gently exhaling through the straw while thinking of loving kindness towards yourself.

Step 5) Repeat this breathing cycle while thinking of a family member, an enemy and then towards a stranger.

TIP: Send compassion to a specific person, community or institution by thinking of them during a breathing cycle.

TIP: Imagine your lungs filling with light or sunshine and try to feel the warmth of loving kindness flow through your body with every breath.

<sup>1</sup> Fredrickson BL, Cohn MA, Coffey KA, Pek J, Finkel SM. Open hearts build lives: positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources. *J Pers Soc Psychol.* 2008;95(5):1045-1062. doi:10.1037/a0013262



# Straw Breathing For Concentration

Benefit: Research shows that meditation can help you improve your ability to concentrate. <sup>1</sup>

Technique: Concentration Breathing

Uses: To help make paying attention easier.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Focus your complete attention on an object in front of you.

Step 3) Inhale deeply through the nose while keeping your eyes open and staying completely focused on that object.

Step 4) Gently exhale through straw until lungs are empty.

Step 5) Repeat this breathing cycle staying focused only on the object for 10 minutes.

TIP: If your mind wanders just say to yourself "thinking" or think the objects name and refocus your attention on the object.

TIP: Use a candle flame or spiritual image as your object to better hold your attention.

<sup>1</sup> Breathing above the brain stem: volitional control and attentional modulation in humans  
Jose L. Herrero, Simon Khuvis, Erin Yeagle, Moran Cerf, and Ashesh D. Mehta Journal of  
Neurophysiology 2018 119:1, 145-159

# Straw Breathing For Mindfulness

Benefit: According to a study in the Journal of Neurophysiology, "paying attention to our breath may activate regions of our brain associated with emotion, attention and awareness."<sup>1</sup>

Technique: Sensory Awareness Breathing / 5 Senses Breathing

Uses: To increase awareness by paying attention to each of our 5 senses.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Inhale deeply through the nose paying attention only the physical sensation of touch.

Step 3) Gently exhale through the straw until lungs are empty focusing only on 5 things you can feel.

Step 4) Repeat this breathing cycle paying attention only to the sense of sound and focusing on 5 things you can hear.

Step 5) Repeat for 5 things you can see, 5 things you can smell and 5 things you can taste.

TIP: Become aware and observe how each of your five senses relate to your breathing.

TIP: If your mind wanders, return to the sensation of each sense as a point of focus.

<sup>1</sup> Herrero JL, Khuvis S, Yeagle E, Cerf M, Mehta AD. Breathing above the brain stem: volitional control and attentional modulation in humans. Journal of Neurophysiology. 2018 Jan 1;119(1):145-159. doi: 10.1152/jn.00551.2017. Epub 2017 Sep 27. PMID: 28954895; PMCID: PMC5866472. (pg. 3)

# Straw Breathing For Restlessness

Benefit: According to a recent study, walking may help in reducing symptoms of anxiety when combined with meditation. <sup>1</sup>

Technique: Mindful Walking Breathing

Uses: To use the sensations of movement as an anchor for your attention while walking.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Inhale deeply through the nose while slowly taking one step forward.

Step 3) Pause and notice the sensations of your feet touching the ground.

Step 4) Gently exhale through straw while slowly taking another step forward.

Step 5) Pause and focus on the movements of your body as your feet leave the ground.

Step 6) Repeat this breathing cycle for 10 steps. Turn for another 10 steps.

**TIP:** Always pay attention to your surroundings and take slow and careful steps in an open area with enough open space so not to trip or fall.

1. Edwards MK, Rosenbaum S, Loprinzi PD. Differential Experimental Effects of a Short Bout of Walking, Meditation, or Combination of Walking and Meditation on State Anxiety Among Young Adults. American Journal of Health Promotion. 2018;32(4):949-958. doi:10.1177/0890117117744913

# Straw Breathing For Stretching

Benefit: "When done in a slow and focused manner, an extended stretching routine can be an excellent relaxation method and stress reducer."<sup>1</sup>

Technique: Asana Breathing

Uses: To align your breathing with various types of stretches or yoga poses.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips.

Step 2) Inhale deeply through the nose when entering a stretch.

Step 3) Pause and then gently exhale through the straw as you hold the pose for 8-12 seconds.

Step 4) Repeat this breathing cycle twice for each pose.

TIP: Inhale during lifting or opening poses and exhale whenever twisting or bending.

TIP: Remove straw and breathe normally if feeling lightheaded, dizzy or shortness of breath.

<sup>1</sup> Elson, D., & Gardiner, J. (2014). Stretching: 35 stretches to improve flexibility and reduce pain. The Harvard Health Publication. Retrieved May 20, 2015, from [www.health.harvard.edu](http://www.health.harvard.edu)

# Straw Breathing For Creativity

Benefit: "Mindfulness supports the skills associated with creativity, and research findings suggest that high levels of self-reported mindfulness correlate to creative practices."<sup>1</sup>

Technique: Visualization Breathing

Uses: To increase creativity by visualizing images from nature such as light, water, earth, sky and mountains.

Step 1) Place straw between closed flat lips and close your eyes.

Step 2) Inhale deeply through the nose while picturing a scene from nature.

Step 3) Gently exhale through the straw while visualizing this image.

Step 4) Repeat this breathing cycle creating more details with each breath.

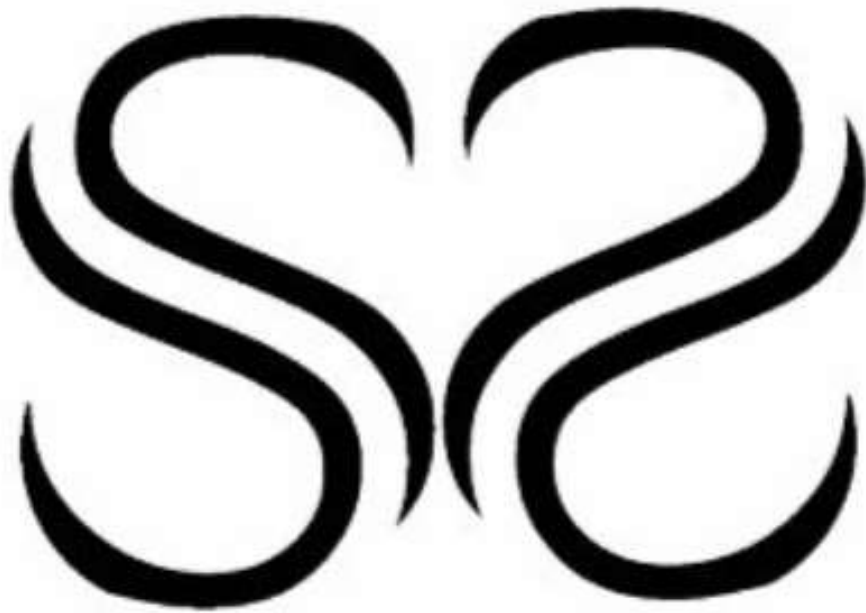
TIP: Add vivid and specific details to your image such as a cabin in the woods, the horizon and colors of a sun rise and set, the smell of the ocean and the sound of a waterfall.

TIP: Try visualizing your thoughts as the passing clouds in a blue sky or your emotions as the inclement weather on a mountain.

<sup>1</sup> Colzato L.S., Szapora A., Hommel B. Meditate to create: The impact of focused-attention and open-monitoring training on convergent and divergent thinking. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2012;3:116.



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