

Take a moment ... to breathe

By the time you finish reading this paragraph, you will have taken three breaths. By the end of the day, you will have breathed about 17,000 times. That works out to more than six million breaths per year.

Yet most of those breaths will go unnoticed. Unless you're ill, in a panic or exercising vigorously, you rarely think about breathing. But perhaps you should, because the way you breathe affects your well-being.⁹

Breathing and the body^{10,11,12}

Every cell in your body requires oxygen to function. Breathing delivers that oxygen while ridding the body of waste carbon dioxide. At rest, you take in about 0.5 litre of air per breath, but that volume increases six-fold during strenuous exercise.

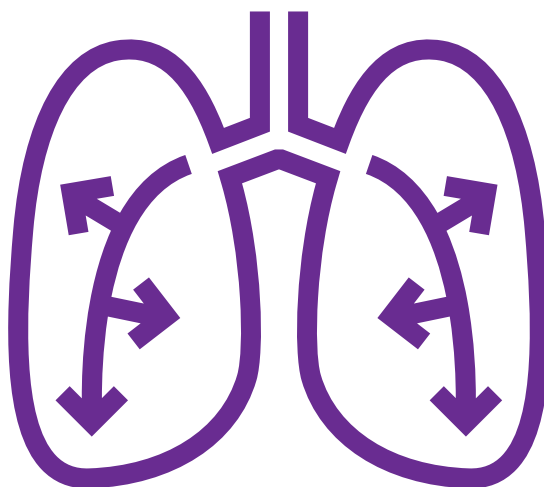
When you breathe in, your diaphragm—a muscle between your chest and abdomen—contracts, allowing your lungs to expand and take in air. When you breathe out, your diaphragm relaxes, returning to its normal dome position and forcing air out through your nose and mouth.

9 <https://www.lung.org/blog/how-your-lungs-work>
10 <https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/how-your-lungs-work/why-do-we-breathe>
11 <https://www.thebreatheffect.com/facts-about-breathing/>
12 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z3xq6fr/revision/2>
13 <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/news/story/study-reveals-brains-finely-tuned-system-of-energy-supply>
14 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5455070/#B13>

Breathing and mental health

Since your brain is part of your body, it obviously needs oxygen. In fact, it uses 20% of your oxygen supply even though it comprises just 2% of your body.

But the breath/brain connection doesn't end there. Here are some benefits of proper breathing:^{14,15,16,17,18}



- Reduces stress
- Reduces depression
- Reduces anxiety
- Helps you relax
- Improves sleep patterns
- Improves cognitive function
- Reduces blood pressure
- Reduces muscle pain

Even a single, one-hour mindfulness session focussed on breathing and awareness of your thoughts can yield positive results.¹⁹

(Check out our Heart-healthy support resources for more information on tools and resources available to members)

15 <https://www.thebreatheffect.com/the-power-of-your-breath/>
16 <https://www.thebreatheffect.com/facts-about-breathing/>
17 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11319675/>
18 <https://wholehealth.wisc.edu/tools/diaphragmatic-breathing/>
19 https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/04/180423135048.htm?utm_medium=sw&utm_source=link&utm_campaign=breathing-exercises-for-more-endurance-improved-mood-more-confidence

Learn to breathe better

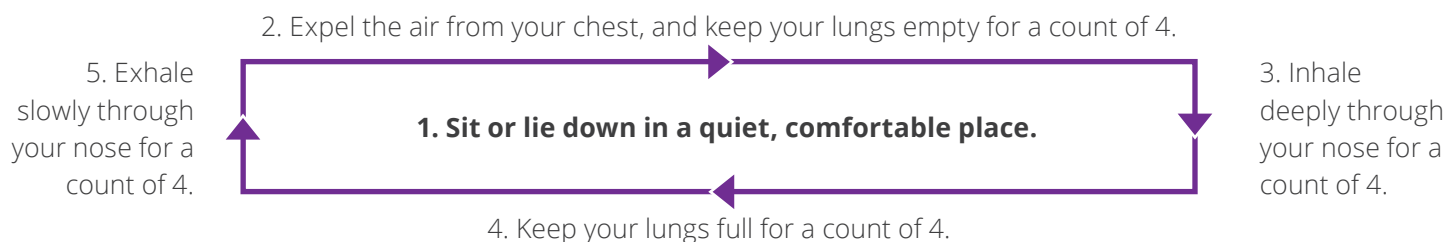
Breathing exercises encourage diaphragmatic breathing (also known as belly or abdominal breathing). The abdomen expands, the chest rises and fresh air floods the lungs. By contrast, shallow breathing relies more on the intercostal muscles that connect the ribs and is less effective.^{20,21}

When you focus on your breathing, it tends to get both deeper and slower. That helps you calm down and takes your mind off whatever is worrying you.

Focusing on breathing is a key part of techniques like yoga and meditation. But there are plenty of breathing exercises you can try on your own. Here are two.

Box breathing²²

Box breathing is used by everyone from yogis to soldiers to elite athletes. Here's how to do it:



Repeat this cycle 3-5 times, working your way up to 5 minutes per session. Practice daily as needed.

365 breathing²³

Try adding this routine to your daily schedule:

Breathe **3** times a day at a rate of **6** cycles per minute (5 seconds in, five seconds out) for **5** minutes.

In our hectic lives, we often neglect our mental health. That's why it's so important to take a moment to think about this important aspect of overall health. At our Mental health resources hub, you can find the information to prevent and manage mental health conditions.

Also, Aetna International members can access the Health Hub—register if you haven't already—to quickly find self-care tools, professional services, member offers, and to submit and track claims and more. Within the Health Hub, you can learn more about the Wysa app, which offers instant access to AI-driven mental well-being support. The app is free for members to download and includes a free one-on-one session with a human coach. For more information about your health care benefits, contact your plan sponsor or one of Aetna International's expert sales consultants for group business or individuals and families.

Take a moment...Discover. Breathe. Heal.

Mental health support resources: <https://www.aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore/workplace-mental-health-support-resource.html>

Health Hub: <https://www.aetnainternational.com/members/login.do>

19 https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/04/180423135048.htm?utm_medium=sw&utm_source=link&utm_campaign=breathing-exercises-for-more-endurance-improved-mood-more-confidence

20 <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/take-a-deep-breath>

21 <https://wholehealth.wisc.edu/tools/diaphragmatic-breathing/>

22 <https://www.maimonidesem.org/blog/box-breathing-technique-nbspnbs>

23 <https://thebestbrainpossible.com/breathing-stress-brain-calm/>