

# How Breathing Exercises Can Help You Stay Calm During the Pandemic

When you're feeling anxious, start by taking long, slow breaths.

Davi Brown, Breathwork Instructor and Head of Content at Breathwrk

So far, 2020 has taken many of us by surprise. A global pandemic during an election year has turned our world upside down. We are left feeling the mental and emotional burdens, during a period of social isolation, no less. If you have been stressed during this time, you are not alone. According to a recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, more than half of adults in the U.S. feel the pandemic has negatively impacted their mental health. These widespread effects are leaving people searching for solutions while our medical system is overburdened. In March, prescriptions for drugs such as Xanax and Klonopin increased by 15% from February, antidepressants by 14%, and sleeping pills by 5%, according to OptumRx. The anxiety and stress we are collectively experiencing require fast-acting and inexpensive solutions. Could these be hiding right beneath our nose?

Breathing exercises are not a new technology, Yogis, freedivers, Olympic athletes, and Navy Seals, have been manipulating their breathing patterns to achieve different outcomes throughout time— and now, science is catching up.

A recent Yale study evaluated three different classroom-based wellness-programs to combat the growing demand for student mental health services. Out of the three programs administered, a breathing based practice was determined to be the most effective, by far. ([To improve students' mental health, Yale study finds, teach them to breathe](#))

“I didn’t realize how much of it was physiology, how you control the things inside you with breathing,” shares Anna Wilkinson, a study participant, and Yale student, “I come out of breathing and meditation as a happier, more balanced person, which is something I did not expect at all.”

Breathwork and breathing exercises are not just the most cost-effective, scientific approach, but the intuitive solution people are reaching for. As COVID-19 is a respiratory illness, the [Google search](#) term ‘breathing exercises’ increased 3x in April.

“Breathe: A new Science to a Lost Art,” authored by James Nestor, is a well-timed and comprehensive guide to breathing properly that made it to #4 on the *New York Times* Bestseller list within a week of being published. In an article he wrote in the [Wall Street Journal](#), Nestor noted, “Inside the breath you just took, there are more

molecules of air than there are grains of sand on all the world's beaches. We each inhale and exhale some 30 pounds of these molecules every day—far more than we eat or drink. The way that we take in that air and expel it is as important as what we eat, how much we exercise, and the genes we've inherited.”

Breathing is important and people are grasping that truth in a widespread manner under the pressures of these times. Now that we know how we breathe is vital and breathing exercises can improve our life, how do we learn?

One accessible solution is Breathwrk, an app that shares simple, science-backed breathing exercises. After launching 8 months ago, Breathwrk has garnered over 140,000 users and continues to grow alongside the breathing trend, teaching people how to enhance their well-being and take control of their lives in uncertain times. The app features techniques to help you fall asleep, remain calm, ease anxiety, focus, wake-up, and more. “It's really exciting to reflect on the past eight months; it's a signal that the market for breathing exercises and alternative fitness/wellness activities are starting to expand,” said CEO and Co-Founder of Breathwrk, Max Gomez. “It's an honor to be able to help so many people in these challenging times,” he continued.

Below is a simple practice from Breathwrk, Calm, designed to reduce stress and anxiety, soothe the mind, and lower your heart rate. The elongated exhale used in this exercise activates your parasympathetic nervous

system to stimulate a relaxation response in your body and mind.

1. Find a comfortable position with a relatively straight spine. You can sit up in a chair or lie down on your back.
2. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest, while you breathe, see that each hand moves as you inhale and exhale to access your full respiratory capacity.
3. Inhale to the count of 4 through the nose.
4. Exhale to the count of 6 through the mouth.
5. Continue this breath pattern, 4 seconds in and 6 seconds out, for 1-3 minutes or until you feel a sense of 'Calm' wash over you.