



## Want to learn a breathing technique that can help you in everyday life?

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**T**here are studies that show that long, slow exhalations are an easy way to affect your vagus nerve, lessen those fight-or-flight responses during the day, and improve your heart rate variability. So what does all that mean?

During inhalation, the sympathetic nervous system causes a brief increase in heart rate. During exhalation, the vagus nerve causes a decrease in heart rate. With a stronger vagus response comes lower chronic stress levels, improved cognition, and better overall health.

You can forget about the science and just remember deep inhalation followed by slow, long exhalation will release some “stress busting” substances to create a “relaxation response” (Benson, et al 1975).

These breathing techniques are commonly seen in practices like yoga, meditation, and tai chi etc. They include

1. Breathing through your abdomen (not upper chest)
2. Slowing down your respiratory cycle (decrease rapid breathing)
3. Longer exhalation time

A study by DeCock et al, 2019 reports how breathing can improve decision making. They took 2 groups of business folks, and the one group who performed 2 minutes of deep breathing with longer exhalations, prior to taking a business related question test, scored higher than the control group.



So how can you incorporate this into your daily life? Try using a 4:8 ratio of a 4 second inhalation followed by an 8 second exhalation. This cycle takes 12 seconds to complete which is equivalent to 5 cycles per minute. 10 cycles equals 2 minutes. You can use your fingers to count 10 cycles of breathing.

If you're feeling “I'm stressed out,” try saying “I'm going to take 2 minutes to do 10 rounds of vagus nerve breathing with 4:8 inhalation/exhalation so I can calm down and perform better on this decision making task.” Breathe in through your nose, fill your lower diaphragm with oxygen, count to 4, and exhale slowly through pursed lips (as if blowing out candles), and count to 8. Repeat 10 times.

Breathing can be a powerful tool to improving your life. It doesn't take a lot of effort. Just make the decision to try it and see what happens. You may be pleasantly surprised.