

From The Times

The wellness brigade believe how you breathe affects your mental and physical health. Scientists think it can improve your memory as well

Last month Scientific American, the US's oldest magazine, which can boast Einstein as a former contributor, published a long article extolling the benefits of "cardiac coherence", a technique that attempts to co-ordinate your breath with your heartbeat. "Cardiac coherence's stabilisation of the heartbeat can dampen anxiety powerfully," the article claimed.

Inhaling through the nose stimulates neurons in the olfactory bulb, which is connected to the hippocampus, the brain's memory hub.

Coherent breathing equalises the inhale and the exhale and you will notice a drop in blood pressure and a drop in heart rate.

The vagus nerve is a cranial nerve which goes right into the stomach. Which is why so many people talk about the stomach being the second brain, because there are so many nerve endings there. By breathing more "consciously" you can learn to control the vagus nerve and reduce stress.

Rebecca Dennis used to work in advertising, but set up a practice called Breathing Tree a decade ago. "I used to have clinical depression. I was on medication [fluoxetine] for 15 years and every time I tried to come off it, I couldn't function. I tried to take my life ten years ago and then two months after trying to take my life, I came to a breath workshop. Within a few months I came off my medication and I haven't taken it for ten years."

The running tip

Improve your nasal breathing so that you can eventually tape up your mouth while running or sleeping. Exercise by Patrick McKeown, the author of The Oxygen Advantage.

- Inhale and exhale through your nose, then pinch your nose and hold your breath
- Walk as many steps as you can, building up a medium to strong air shortage
- Resume nose breathing and calm yourself as quickly as possible. (If you're not able to recover within two to three breaths, you've held your breath for too long)
- Wait one to two minutes, then do another breath hold

- Repeat for six breath holds

For the “ha breath”, stand with your feet placed shoulder-width apart and knees bent

To ease digestion

Try “ha breath” for digestion and joyful energy by Rebecca Dennis, the author of *And Breathe*.

- Stand with your feet placed shoulder-width apart and knees bent
- Place your hands on your lower abdomen and inhale through the mouth expanding the diaphragm
- Exhale quickly through the mouth making the sound “ha”
- Repeat rapidly for two minutes

The 4-7-8 exercise: exhale completely through your mouth, making a “whoosh” sound

The sleeping aid

Can’t sleep? To help you to relax, try this 4-7-8 exercise by Rebecca Dennis.

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a “whoosh” sound
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four
- Hold your breath for a count of seven. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound, to a count of eight. This is one breath
- Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths