

DON'T WAIT TO EXHALE

You may have been given this advice by a well-meaning other, “Stop, just take a deep breath.” Or you might be conditioned to say, “I just have to catch my breath.” Don’t do this. This is not good advice. Why? Because the biology of breath tells us that relaxation/relief does not come when we take a deep inhale or hold our breath. Relaxation comes specifically when we exhale.

When we inhale, we take in oxygen, which, obviously, is good for us. But it is through the act of exhaling that true relief can be felt. As we exhale, carbon dioxide is released from our body. Pent-up carbon dioxide can cause stress, increased tension. So here’s a helpful hint: when you breathe, make sure that the exhalation is longer than the inhalation. This ensures balanced breathing. And while you’re at it, breathe deeply. Breathe deeply from your diaphragm (lower abdomen). Relax the midsection of your body when you breathe and you’ll be doing yourself a favor in terms of muscle tension and potential pain, including digestive issues, with which so many of us are plagued.

Do yourself a favor and amplify the peaceful power of the exhale by putting your voice to it. Take an “Ahhh Breath,” a breath with sound behind it. The sound “Ahhh ...” has two main purposes. First, it brings immediate physical, mental and emotional release. It helps us let go of what we might be holding too tightly.

Secondly, “Ahhh” is the sound of delight, pure pleasure. It’s the sound we make when we taste something delicious or when we witness a beautiful site. It can even bring a tingle of appreciation to our heart and a smile to our face.

Try using an Ahhh breath right now, wherever you are. Bring your attention to the tip of your nose and breath in (mouth closed). Exhale by dropping your attention to your throat and say “Ahhh” (mouth open).

Do it again, a little louder this time, and put some umph into it. “Ahhh.” Do it again, expelling more air, and making a bit more noise, too. “AHHH.” Three times is a charm.

Bring your awareness back to your whole self and feel the relief that has arrived in your belly and chest—throughout your whole body, in fact. Feel the pleasure of that. Experience the satisfaction of having taken good care of yourself in this moment by taking three deep, intentional breaths and letting go of all that you were holding so tightly.

“Ahhh” spells relief. It calms the body, the mind and the emotions, and opens the heart all at the same time. Isn’t that wonderful? Ease-filled multi-tasking!

