

## DAILY DOGA INSPIRATIONS / Mindfully Living and Learning with Dogs!

### Breathing Nose-To-Navel – Five Techniques

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Feeling stressed? Scattered? Overwhelmed? As a Registered Yoga Teacher who integrates breathing into classes at [Dog Talk Training and Wellness \(Daily Doga\)](#) for dogs and dog parents, these five simple breathing techniques can restore your sense of well-being. We have to breathe to stay alive, so why not use stressful times at work, in traffic, at home, anyway, anytime to engage with your breath (life force)?

Watching our dogs can help teach us how to breathe. I listen to my dogs breathe. Some people look at me as if I need a long vacation at a mental health retreat, BUT it works! Dogs will exhale long and strong, especially during stress, confusions, like when we are babbling or not being clear on what we expect them to do.

**A word of care:** Don't get hung up on the details of what finger should hold what nostril shut. Simply do it! What works for you will likely be what you continue using the most. If you are in your car, or at a dinner table, expect some funny looks.

Be mindful that focused breathing, as you are about to experience, may change how you feel. There are a few precautions like high blood pressure. Listen to your body. Whenever you feel like you need a moment to yourself to renew and revitalize, these five active breathing exercises can provide amazing benefits to your mind and body, *and teaching dogs with [awareness](#)*.

**1. ALTERNATIVE NOSTRIL BREATHING - ANB (Nadi Shodhana):** I have tried this on my dogs because they trust me. Practice on yourself first because most dogs instinctively know how to calm themselves breathing. WE HUMANS need to increase our awareness of the dog's communication (body and vocal visit [Dog Talk Media](#)). ANB can help decrease pulse and respiratory, as well as diastolic blood pressure, the number that shows how much pressure is in the arteries between heartbeats. Experts speculate that ANB stimulates the hypothalamus to turn on the parasympathetic nervous system, which controls involuntary actions such as the rate at which our heart beats - and the widening or narrowing of our blood vessels. Amazing huh?

**TRY IT:** Press the fleshy part of your thumb against your right nostril. Exhale and inhale once through your left nostril. Release your thumb and press either your index or middle finger (whatever is most comfortable) on your left nostril. Exhale and inhale once through your right nostril. Repeat this about 27 times or at least 3X a day. Ancient sages believe that multiples of nine synchronize with body rhythms.

**2. MEMORY BOOSTING BREATH - MBB:** Have you ever misplaced a cell phone, keys, dogs, or children - haha? Explains Shirley Telles, Ph.D. head of the Indian Council of Medical Research in Yoga and Neurophysiology in Bangalore, India, "When you exhale through your

left nostril only, you activate nerve endings toward the back of the nose that stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system (see Alternative Nostril Breathing). Breathing through your left nostril can help wake-up our short-term and spatial memory. For example, being alert helps you navigate complex areas like parking lots (tight squeezes), and finding things (your cell phone is in your coat pocket and your keys are between the car seats).

**TRY IT:** Gently press the fleshy part of your thumb against your right nostril. Inhale and exhale through your left nostril about 27 times. Repeat up to four times a day.

1. **BRAIN DEFOGGING BREATH - BDB:** Be careful! There is a quick way to sharpen your senses but if you habitually drink caffeine and/or suffer from hypertension, use with awareness. In a 2012 study, Dr. Telles found that men who breathed through the right nostril entered into a state conducive to being attentive (WOW). In a real-world setting, right-nostril breathing may improve alertness during long-distance driving or enhance concentration when you are juggling multiple tasks. The technique slightly increases blood pressure. Nerve fibers at the back of the right nostril activate parts of the hypothalamus - and other brain areas that control attention.

**TRY IT:** Press the fleshy part of your thumb against your left nostril. Inhale and exhale through your right nostril 27 times. Repeat up to four times a day. Can women use this? I don't see why not. I just tried it, I feel invigorated but I'm making a lot of typing mistakes. That could mean many things ... anyway!

2. **ENERGIZING BREATH – EB (also known as the Bellows Breath or Bhastrika).** Ward off bouts of fatigue – in the afternoon (anytime) when you need renewal. Short, fast rhythmic breaths increase energy and provide a quick pick-me-up.

**TRY IT:** Sit in a comfortable position. Place your hands on your abdomen. Inhale forcefully through your nose, expanding your belly (nose-to-navel breathing). Exhale forcefully, contracting your belly. Continue to alternative inhales and exhales of equal duration. Keep your shoulders, head and neck relatively still while you are breathing. You can do this sitting at a computer, but be careful of spitting on it! Practice three rounds, 15 to 20 complete breathes per round. Anything that works takes practice. Do you feel as if you've just participated in circuit training, jogging – any form of exhilaration? Studies using electroencephalography to measure brain activity have found that bellows breathing stimulates the central nervous system, causing an increase in energy that is followed by a feeling of calmness – like after taking a brisk walk (or jogging euphoria).

3. **SLEEP-INDUCING BREATH – AID (Ocean Breath or Ujjayi):** Remember Darth Vader in Star Wars? Ocean Breath is a deep and slightly noisy breath that when in close quarters (yoga class, airplane, carpooling) could create friction to those not participating. Ujjayi is the breath of rest. It makes me giggle. It has been used in treatment planning for PTSD and anxiety related issues. Any kind of focused deep breathing that helps us calm our senses and body helps. The key is FOCUS ON THE BREATH not the million THINGS flowing around

your head. Let-it-go for a moment. As with the other breathing techniques, Ocean Breath affects the parasympathetic nervous system by activating the ***Vagus Nerve that links breathing with heart rate and many different functions throughout the body.*** In my book, [Awareness Centered Training – ACT](#), I talk about how this affects our dogs too! Dog parents, be aware that dogs who are stressed, anxious, fearful or shy need to learn how to calm themselves. Breathing is a vital part of this first with us, then the dogs.

**TRY IT:** Open your mind and close your mouth. Inhale through your nose. Exhaling via your nose, constrict the back of your throat to make an ocean sound like Darth Vader. A more pleasant visual/audio may be “like listening to a seashell and hearing the ocean.” Take no more than 10 full breaths. More may energize you and keep you awake, especially at night.

**EXTRA – EXTRA: MEDITATE WHILE WALKING YOUR DOG:** When you walk your dog calmly, not easy to do at certain times I know, BUT try anyway; you can relax and teach your dog to relax too. The key is to plan ahead of time. Any dog that has been confined for long periods need the pure enjoyment (sniffs and exercise) of being outdoors. Meditation is not only about focusing on breath while sitting still or lying down. You can integrate mini-meditations and affirmations (I am sane, I am calm, I am amazing) anywhere. Walking is an active form of relaxing that ***boosts calmness and clarity.***

A quote from Nicolai, Wellness Program Director, Miraval Resort and Spa, Tucson, Arizona: “When you sit and meditate, there’s nothing to distract you from your internal chatter. When you breath walk, your focus is directed outward as you try to match your inhales and exhales to the pace of walking.” This can be easier said than done, but like anything, it takes practice.

I do this in classes at [Dog Talk](#) to calm dogs and dog parents when they first arrive. Dogs simply can’t learn and parents can’t teach if the mind and body is swirling like a tornado. Dogs live in the present moment, thus, teaching is more effective in that moment - and when we are calm. Decision making becomes sharper in all areas of our lives. Engaging with others and our dogs becomes less about being right - and more about listening AND taking care of ourselves. We know when to get into it, and not (pick our battles).

To start, with or without a dog, walk at a comfortable pace. Obviously, with our dog, this can be more challenging. Perhaps you need to walk a little faster for a few minutes. Re-focus to breath walk. Breathe deeply nose-to-navel to the count of 4. Each count of your inhale will match your leg strides.

When you reach the end of the inhalation and the fourth step/stride (size does not matter), begin to exhale, again counting to four. Get into a rhythm with your body. Eventually, each BREATH WILL BLEND HARMONIOUSLY WITH YOUR STEP. A wavelike pattern will be created, rising and falling. Counting helps to stay engaged. For example, you may want to try inhaling to the count of 4, but exhaling to the count of 8. Do what works best for you! Enjoy the Journey!