

# Square Breathing

**D**o you train hard in the gym and want to improve your performance? Perhaps you're a smoker or have recently given up? Maybe you have asthma or hayfever or are recovering from a cold? Training your breath may help.

The breathing exercises here can reduce feelings of tightness by removing tension and calming your mind. Over time they will also improve your breath capacity by extending the length and depth of each in-breath and out-breath. Being 'square' can help develop your general fitness levels; you may notice a difference in the gym or on the pitch. Breath awareness also helps you notice where you're at today, right now.

While doing this, be patient and listen to your body. Don't over exert or force your breathing. Practise for five minutes every day and you'll soon feel the difference.

Sit comfortably in a position that you can maintain for five minutes. Try cross legged or kneeling, sit on a chair, or the edge of your bed. Keep the spine upright and the shoulders back, check that your head and neck stay relaxed. You could use the sound of a ticking clock as a regular beat or just count in your head. It takes roughly a second to say "one elephant" in your mind.

## Breath Awareness with Counting

- Breathe in through the nose and sigh out through the mouth three times to relax the jaw, throat and upper body. Sit comfortably upright.
- Now breathe in gently through the nose, counting, until the lungs feel full but not over inflated.
- Breathe out through the nose and count the release of the breath. Don't push or force it out.
- You will notice a natural pause between each part of the breath. Allow this pause time to happen but don't hold it.
- Repeat, breathing and counting a few times so that you have a general idea of your natural breath count today. It's quite normal for one part of the breath to be longer than the other and it varies from person to person. An average count is between three and six.
- Use the lower number of this 'checking in' breath count as a starting point for the next exercise.



## Equalising Square Breath

- Begin to breathe in and out using the same count and pace to equalise each part of the breath. If the shortest part of your breath in the last exercise was a count of four, breathe in for the count of four and breathe out for the count of four this time.
- Visualise your next in-breath as one side of a square and the following out-breath as the second side. Your second in-breath is the next side of the square and the following out-breath completes the shape.
- Breathing in and out, using your equal breath count six times to make three 'squares'. Take a short rest after the third square. Notice how you feel.
- Was it comfortable and calm? Was it too fast? Too slow? If the count was too slow to match the breath then make it shorter by one. If you could have comfortably breathed in longer, add one more to your count, breathing in and out for five beats each time. Don't add more than one or two beats to your original count as this will be too much exertion in one session.
- Try this again for six complete breaths, or three 'squares'.
- Have another short rest and hold these questions in your mind – "How has this way of breathing made me feel? How am I?"

# Square Breathing (cont)

- Repeat once more so that you do three sets of six breaths (three 'squares').
- Finish with three sighing breaths and have a stretch. You may feel like sitting still in meditation now, without counting, just being aware of your natural breath for five minutes.
- Practise the same breath count for a couple of weeks before adding to the count so that you gradually improve. You can take the breath count to a maximum of eight seconds if you practise regularly and increase gradually.

