

# HOW TO USE YOUR BREATH TO ENERGIZE OR UNWIND

Your autonomic nervous system (ANS) coordinates cardiovascular, respiratory, digestive, urinary, and reproductive functions. It constantly monitors and adjusts internal water, nutrient and gas balance - and does so without instructions or interference of the conscious mind.

The ANS is concerned with maintaining homeostasis within your body. It contains two primary divisions - SNS and PNS that work in opposition, whenever one is being activated, another one is being suppressed.

## SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM (SNS) - the accelerator



SNS is concerned with increasing alertness, metabolic rate, and muscular abilities. When sympathetic activation occurs, you will experience:

- Increased alertness
- A feeling of energy and euphoria
- Elevated blood pressure, heart rate and breathing rate
- A general elevation in muscle tone
- The mobilization of energy reserves

Whenever you inhale, you turn on the SNS, slightly speeding up the heart beat.

## PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM (PNS) - the brake



PNS is concerned with relaxation, food processing and creating energy reserves. When parasympathetic activation occurs, you will experience:

- Decrease in alertness
- A feeling of calmness and relaxation
- Reduction in heart rate and force of contraction
- Constriction of the respiratory passageways
- An increase in digestive activity

Whenever you exhale, the PNS turns on, activating the vagus nerve to slow down the heart rate.



Deep inhalation tends to have a more invigorating, energizing and expanding effect. Holding the breath in (breath retention) will emphasize the energizing qualities of the inhalation.

**Inhalation + Retention = Inhalation part of the breath**



Long exhalation tends to be calming, grounding and stabilizing. Holding the breath out comfortably (breath suspension) will enhance the calming qualities of the exhalation.

**Exhalation + Suspension = Exhalation part of the breath**

## TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU FEEL

### 1 Deepen the breath

### 2 Lengthen the inhalation or the exhalation part of the breath, depending on your intention



to help wake up in the morning



to overcome the afternoon slump



after a stressful commute



after seating for too long



before an important meeting (if anxious)



to unwind before bed



- Never force the breath, keep the flow of the breath smooth. If it becomes jerky, you are practicing beyond your capacity.
- DO NOT make your inhalation longer than your exhalation, or your retention longer than your exhalation. It's OK if IN+RET > EX
- DO NOT hold the breath for very long. It's more important to lengthen your inhalation and/or exhalation.