

# FOOD & MOOD

## COACHING

### SLOW NOSTRIL BREATHING: THE 'WHY' AND 'HOW'

#### WHY?

**There are two key parts to slow nostril breathing:**

1. Breathing through the nose (not the mouth) – both the inhale and the exhale travel through the nose, keeping mouth relaxed and closed throughout
2. Breathing slower than your usual pace

#### Benefits of nostril breathing

Breathing through the nose invites air to enter the body as nature intended, through the tissues of the nasal cavity where it can be warmed, moistened, filtered, and purified before reaching the lungs. When we breathe through the nose, according to James Nestor in his latest book *Breath, The New Science of a Lost Art* (2020), “You absorb 20 percent more oxygen”.

He also speaks to his findings from 10 years of research for his book, that humans in general are breathing less through their nose and more through their mouth, which is an inefficient way to breath. When mouth breathing, the air is not filtered or purified as it doesn't travel through the nasal tissues and leads to more dehydration. “Mouth breathing causes the body to lose 40% more water” (Nestor, 2020).

Mouth breathing is more likely to put our body in a state of physiological stress, activating the Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS). When we exercise, we are more inclined to mouth breath, naturally, and this is ok for relatively short bursts of time. Exercise is a ‘good stress’ for the body, which we need as part of overall healthy balance. It's when we are in a state of stress for a majority of the time that is proving to be detrimental to overall health. We need long periods of Parasympathetic Nervous System (PSNS) activity to balance us and promote rest and rejuvenation. Nostril breathing stimulates the PSNS.

#### Benefits of slow breathing

Slow breathing practices have been adopted in the modern world across the globe due to their claimed health benefits. Historically, slow breathing (among other techniques) is believed to correlate with increased mental and physical wellbeing and now, modern science is supporting what ancient cultures have known for centuries.

Most of us will breathe at a natural rate of anywhere from 12-20 breaths per minute at rest. Slow breathing is generally considered to be 5-8 breaths per minute; it is something that requires intentional practice and can take some getting used to.

For the purposes of this week's exercise, we are going to aim for a slow breathing technique that is also called Resonance or Coherent Breathing. This rhythm of breathing is a calming practice that encourages the heart, lungs and circulation into a state of coherence, where the systems of the body are working at peak efficiency.



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### **It is simple and effective and involves:**

Breathing in for 5.5 seconds, breathing out for 5.5 seconds, which over the course of a minute equates to a breathing rate of 5.5 breaths.

### **HOW?**

1. Sit with spine erect, but relaxed (sit on a block, a cushion to assist this posture) OR  
If you are new to breathing exercises you may find it much more comfortable to lie down on your back.  
Use a pillow or cushion(s) to support your head and lower back (placing one under your head and another under the back of your thighs, just above the knee crease)
2. Relax your hands either at your side or on your belly if laying down, or on your thighs or in your lap if seated
3. Gently close your lips to inhale and exhale easily through the nose
4. For your first few rounds of breath, breathe at a pace that is natural for you
5. Then start to slow your breathing pace down. Drawing longer inhalations and longer exhalations
6. Building towards a pace of inhaling for 5.5 seconds (count 1-one-onethousand, 2-one-thousand, 3-one-thousand etc.) and without pausing, exhaling for 5.5 seconds.
7. Continue breathing in this way for 1 minute, building over time to 3 minutes, 5 minutes and so on. This pace will equate to approximately 5.5 breaths per minute which is considered in many practices the optimal pace of breath for health and wellbeing.

### **Important notes:**

1. Once comfortable practicing this exercise laying down, progress to a seated posture.
2. Keep head neck and shoulders relaxed, whether seated or laying down.
3. Practice for a few breaths through to a few minutes of breaths – 3-5 minutes is a great starting point and building from there.
4. Take note of how you feel before engaging in this practice and afterwards. Simply observe.

