

## Simple Yogic Techniques for Stress Reduction

*Chronic stress is a largely invisible danger to the public health. Although many agree that a healthy diet, regular exercise, and quality sleep are central to excellent health, chronic stress is often overlooked. The following hatha yoga techniques work well due to their simplicity and direct effect on the mind-body complex.*

### Concentration and Meditation

**1. Observing the Breath.** *The goal of this technique is to watch the inhalation and exhalation without controlling the breath in any way.*

In a comfortable seated or reclining pose that allows your spine to be straight, soften your shoulders, lift your heart, and allow the belly to be soft and responsive to the breath. Close your eyes and gently focus centrally and up, toward the root of the nose.

Choose a watch-word for the inhalation (such as “in”) and a watch-word for the exhalation (such as “out”). Begin to watch the breath as it flows in through the nose and down to the very low belly, and out again through the nose. *Silently* say your watch-words on the inhalation and exhalation. Track but do not control the breath.

If (when) the mind begins to wander or control the breath, gently release the technique and begin with the next full breath. Guide your mind back to the task as gently as possible, like you are teaching a small child.

This technique teaches us to observe without the need to attach, judge, and control everything. We are happier when we can accept life around us as it is.

**2. The “Neti, Neti, Neti” technique.** *The goal of this technique is to hold the mind to one point without effort.*

In a comfortable seated or reclining pose that allows your spine to be straight, soften your shoulders, lift your heart, and allow the belly to be soft and responsive to the breath. Close your eyes and gently focus centrally and up, toward the root of the nose.

Begin to sit in meditation, continuing to relax deeper into the posture. Allow the mind to remain clear.

If (when) the mind begins to wander, calmly but resolutely say to yourself (silently): “Neti.” (Literally “not this”-- meaning “I am not this thought”) “Neti.” (meaning-- “I am not this thought thinking I am not that thought.”) “Neti.” (confirming-- “I am not thought.”)

Having broken the thought’s hold on your mind, return to your meditation.

## Breathing ---

**3. Low-Belly Breath.** *The goal of this breath is to help reduce fear, stress, and anxiety, drawing the energy away from the head and down toward the pelvic floor.*

In a comfortable seated or reclining pose that allows your spine to be straight, soften your shoulders, lift your heart, and allow the belly to be soft and responsive to the breath. Close your eyes and gently focus centrally and up, toward the root of the nose. Rest the hands on the knees, palms down if excitable and palms up if tired. This breath may also be done lying flat on the back on a bed or floor.

Breathe into the low belly, from the tip of the nose to the very low belly-- visualize that you are filling the entire pelvic bowl and abdomen, softly and easily. Fill the front, sides, and back of this area. Allow the low belly to receive the breath (you may wish to place one hand on the low belly to help direct your breath). With each inhalation, make a bit more space internally. With each exhalation, soften the course of the breath.

Notice your feeling state before and after the technique.

**4. Three Part Breath.** *The goal of this technique is to utilize the entire lungs while breathing. This technique is particularly good for those who tend to breathe shallowly, in the upper chest.*

In a comfortable seated or reclining pose that allows your spine to be straight, soften your shoulders, lift your heart, and allow the belly to be soft and responsive to the breath. Close your eyes and gently focus centrally and up, toward the root of the nose. Rest the hands on the knees, palms down if excitable and palms up if tired. This breath may also be done lying flat on the back on a bed or floor.

Breathe into and expand the low belly (see the previous technique).

When the low-belly breath is established and flowing easily, use your next inhalation to first expand/soften the low belly, then continue to draw the breath back and up to expand the low back area. Visualize the low back expanding like a giant balloon where the rib cage meets the low back (the kidney/adrenal area).

When the kidney area breath is established and flowing easily, use your next inhalation to first expand/soften the low belly, then up and back to soften the kidney area, then continue to draw the breath forward and up to the heart area (center of upper chest). Visualize the heart expanding forward and out energetically while keeping the shoulder-blades soft and heavy, away from the ears.

Continue to allow the breath to flow more easily on its path, softly expanding the internal space. Notice your feeling state before and after this technique.