

Abdominal Breathing Exercises combined with Head, Neck, and Shoulder Motion

Throughout the ages, from all the masters of the martial arts, spiritual leaders, wise men, as well as medical texts, comes the insight that breathing is one of the most important body functions to calm and centre the mind and relax the body. While there are many different ways of breathing for various reasons, this exercise will focus on deep abdominal breathing to relax the body and mind.

Head, Neck, and Shoulder Motion

Sit comfortably with your feet apart on the floor, keep your back straight, your head tall and your arms relaxed with hands on your legs or in your lap. Begin by slowly **bending your head forward** (Figure 1) until you feel the stretching of the muscles in the back of the neck. Do this 3 times, slowly, focusing your attention on the lengthening neck muscles. Now, **jut your jaw forward** (Figure 2), 3 times slowly, again focusing your attention on the stretching of the muscles in the front of your neck. Progress to **rotating your head** (Figure 3) to the left, and to the right 3 times. Then, tilt your **ear towards your shoulder** (Figure 4) to the left, and to the right, 3 times. Finally, **rotate your shoulders, first in a forward to backward circle and then in a backward to forward circle** (Figure 5) 3 times in each direction. After each circle, pull your shoulders downward towards your feet.

The range of motion exercises will help to centre your mind and reduce the tension in the neck and shoulder muscles as well as increase circulation in blood vessels and the lymphatic system.

Deep Abdominal Breathing

Now begin to take a slow, deep breath in through your **nose** to a count of five. 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5. Use the abdomen and diaphragm rather than just the chest muscles. Push your abdomen out as though it were a balloon expanding. With this long and deep breath think of the clean, fresh air entering your lungs. Hold this breath for a second or two and then let it out slowly to a count of five, 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5, through your **mouth**. Keep your mouth partially closed to allow the air to exit slowly. Draw your abdomen in as you exhale. As you breath the air out, think of all the tension leaving your body and allow your shoulders to drop as the tension leaves your body—feel your shoulders drop as you breath out. Perform the deep abdominal breathing three times—in through your nose—out through your mouth—let your shoulders drop. Now, sit comfortably and breath normally and relax for several minutes and rest with the calmness and ease your body and mind will now be experiencing.

Perform this exercise “anywhere” and “anytime”. Practise it, and experience more effective levels of body and mind relaxation.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5