



## Master Breath® 101

### Rapid, steady adjustment to optimize your autonomic system, release set points and manage stress

Master Breath is a dramatic name for a dramatic breathing pattern. This exercise will completely readjust your nervous system and give you nerves of steel. If you learn to do the master breath properly, you can eliminate the most tenacious stress from your body and interrupt rumination and quiet your inner critic.

The breath pattern is simple--rapid breathing through the nose! The rate of breathing should be about 120 strokes per minute. A stroke is one inhalation and exhalation. This is really fast!

We begin life as an infant with rates around 30-60 bpm (breaths per minute). When we toddle our way forward over the landscape it changes to 24-40 bpm. As a preschooler we go slower at 22-34 bpm. Through grade school we slide down to 18-30 bpm. As adolescent into our adult years, we glide into 12-16 bpm.

Of course, those are 35-45 bpm for mild exercise to 60-70 bpm for more strenuous efforts. Our breath rate, and more importantly our breath pattern is a dynamic picture of our energy demands and availability. It also varies with our emotions, our assessment of pains to avoid and pleasures to enjoy.

When our heart, metabolism and nervous system are healthy and synchronized, we can increase our rate and recover quickly. That is important as a metric for a stress that is normal and resilient or can become a problem with slow or long recovery to allostasis.

Attention to the code of the breath and how to use it has been refined in many traditions across cultures. Breath is one thing we all share and that we can control to our benefit. Breath work combined with meditation is known to take us to high performance, clear perception, enhanced states of intuition and the ability to connect with other people and with nature.

Just think of the breath pattern, rate, and responsiveness to our inner and outer condition a language or code that connects and communicates across many levels of our cells, organs, feelings, perceptual acuity, and consciousness. One breath pattern can signal happiness another anxiety and still another a spiral of depression and yet another a ticket to dissociation and loneliness. Refined with meditation the breath can be a gateway to expanded states of spiritual insight, connection with our self and others and equanimity.

Where does the master breath lie in this spectrum of breath and pattern? 120 bpm is like fast dance music. When we look at it in a lab, we see an increased heart rate variation. The ratios of its frequencies show us that the master breath improves the strength of our parasympathetic nervous system- the brake of the system. So, we can spin up with our sympathetic system and other chemical signals of excitement, fear, anticipation, or desire and quickly apply our vagal brake to calm down. It is that quick variation that lets us sample our body sensations and environment in high-definition mode. When we are stuck, depressed, traumatized we have little variation.

With the master breath done properly all those patterns also gain an internal self-reflective quality. It shows a coherent organization that suggests easy communication across scales of the signals and motions of our



metabolism. Essentially it opens our flexibility, our adaptability and provides a mechanism to unlock and reset set points and patterns of habit and contraction in our body and feelings.

This is why I call it the master breath. It quickly shifts your body and nerves from one state to another. It prepares your senses to open. It brings energetic flexibility to all the other breath patterns you use. It is like a master key for access to all your inner rooms.

It is used in many exercises, postures and sequences of movement and meditation. It is an essential spice in the gourmet energy cupboard. Used correctly it is a kriya- breathwork that is balanced, elevating and grounding. Students who learn and practice the master breath describe its effect as:



#### **Doing the Master Breath:**

Sit comfortably with your spine straight. Pay attention to your breath. Make your breath continuous and very smooth. It is not jerky. I think of the smooth motion of a dolphin swimming in calm waters.

Your nostrils remain relaxed and not squeezed closed by the force of your breathing. To exhale, expel air as you contract your diaphragm and lift your solar plexus up as you gently lift your navel point and draw it in. To inhale, relax your abdomen so that your diaphragm extends downward but keep your chest lifted slightly. Adjust your inhale with a gentle assist- not by just relaxing to let the breath seep in. Adjust the inhale and exhale to equal. When you have it right and you do not use unnecessary muscles, your breath seems to come in naturally with little effort.

Concentrate as if breathing from the solar plexus and engaging the navel automatically from there. This will feel automatic and smooth if you contract your diaphragm rapidly enough. Rapidly at 120 bpm but steady not erratic. Your chest should stay relaxed and slightly lifted throughout the breathing cycle. Keep the ratio completely equal.

When you breathe this rapidly, small changes in the ratio of the inhale and exhale can easily produce big changes in the code you produce, the actual air volume you process and the way your nervous system answers the code. If you inhale too much relative to your exhale, you will become dizzy and feel as if you just drank a gallon of coffee. If you exhale too much, you will slow down and get too serious. That is uncomfortable and unsustainable. When you get the ratio equalized, your breath gains a momentum and becomes easy. You find yourself becoming alert, energized, and relaxed—all at once.

Keep your upper chest slightly lifted. Some people, especially paradoxical breathers, work too hard at this. If you're uncertain whether your upper chest remains still during this exercise, place one of your hands on your upper chest and the other hand between your solar plexus and your navel point. The upper hand should remain still while you



do the breath of fire. The power comes from below. Your lower palm feels the upper abdomen near your solar plexus pulsating with your breath. Move the palm down closer to but above your navel and it flexes with the pulse of the breath. If you now move your lower hand beneath your navel point, you will find almost no movement occurs. The lower abdominal muscles are still. This assures you do not tense your lower back muscles or constrain the movement of your ribs. The master breath, then, is not a lower belly pump. That would be a bellows breath. You get a full continuous breath flow. Energy to every cell calling for a taste of aliveness.

Relax your shoulders and lower back. Think of this whole exercise as play instead of work. If you pump your belly or tighten your shoulders, you will eventually feel a constriction in your lower back that tires you. Lift your chest a bit, relax your shoulders, and put on the glimmer of a smile as you enjoy the energizing activity that relaxes you at the same time.

If you are not sure if your breath is equal in and out, simply plug your ears and listen to the sound of your breath. The “shushing” sound should be the same in and out. If they are not the same, adjust your breath by centering attention and movement from the solar plexus area and checking you have a lifted and still chest. Your chin should be pulled in or at least not tipped up and back.

Using music to pace the breath and to add positive emotions to your practice makes it easy.

I created with a great musician, Hargo, a precise 31-minute track of music to use. It has many layers and takes you through a range of moods and qualities over the entire track.

You get it to stream or to purchase and download at <https://linktr.ee/hargokhalsa36>

People frequently ask if this makes you hyperventilate. No. We could say it gives you optimal ventilation—great lungs, responsive autonomic support, powerful breath, and elevated awareness. Over pumping the belly could bring the inhale-exhale ratio into imbalance. This Master Breath done well can be practiced from 1 minute to as long as 31 minutes, still feeling great and without hyperventilation signs. If you get tightened fingers or dizziness stop and rest your breathing. Check the details of your breath practice or ask for guidance. Each of us is very individual in our baseline of breathing habits. Once we did blood tests after such a long breathing exercise that revealed a stable CO2 level with the oxygen content slightly raised. Nonetheless, always begin with moderate time periods for each practice when developing any new physical skill, especially breathing.

As a clinician for many years, I found in mentoring and designing treatment programs that the master breath done in combination with a meditative long deep breath and movement followed by authentic stillness can unlock deep stress, traumas, and open creative action. Combined with rhythmical body movements it creates energy and relaxation simultaneously to give you a sense of agency, possibility, and clarity. With regular practice it becomes a resilient trait that dynamic awareness uses to make your best decisions under complexity and stress when there is little time to think and analyze. It also enhances emotional self-regulation.

Enjoy! A good first practice is to do it for 3 minutes steadily. Then sit for 2 minutes attentive and relaxed focused through the brow point. Repeat 3 more minutes of active breath. Then sit for 2 more minutes as you open your senses. Scan and sense your entire body and then the vast space all around you. Then use each breath wisely for a stellar day.

I want to emphasize that you should always consult your physician or other healthcare provider before changing your diet or starting an exercise program of any kind. This information is educational and does not make any medical claims or imply any expectation regarding physical or mental health. We recommend you learn from an experienced practitioner. You try these techniques at your own responsibility with the guidance of your health and medical advisors who can give you a personal assessment of any conditions or guidelines you may need for optimal practice.



You might like to do a brief self-assessment of your experience after a master breath practice. Compare how you felt before doing the practice to the qualities of the shift you created by your practice. Here is a check list to play with and to develop your own words and observations.

<b>What do you sense after doing this Master Breath? Scale from 1 to 10 (highest)</b>	
Positive energy elevated	
Relaxed calmness	
Expanded Space or Openness	
Alertness	
Connectedness with self	
Ability to be fully present and let the mind wander	
Quickly becoming still	
Increased Sensory Acuity	
Stronger sense of self or presence	
Connectedness with others	
Ability to quickly become still	
Ability to switch state	
Ability to be fully mindful and let the mind wander	
Increase in Awareness level and/or scope	
<b><i>Write your own words and observations below</i></b>	
<b><i>Sketch something that reflects your state of energy, mood, and aliveness</i></b>	