

Conscious Breathing Practices for the Nine Types

By Peter O'Hanrahan

Paying attention to the breath is a basic practice for self-management and personal/professional growth. With breath awareness and breathing techniques we can actually shift our internal, physical and emotional experience.

This is particularly helpful under conditions of pressure or conflict, when we tend to hold our breath and hold tension in our bodies. These practices create more space on the inside, which allows us to manage our personal reactivity and emotions. They provide a way to become centered, particularly when we are in stressful situations or communicating with people whom we find difficult.

- Breathing deeply helps us experience both our physical sensations and our emotions, while holding the breath diminishes our feelings and contact with our bodies and body-based intelligence. If we don't breathe much, we won't feel much.
- When we are taken over by negative feelings or reactions to other people or events, conscious breathing calms the body and the nervous system and helps us be more flexible and appropriate in our responses.
- By focusing our attention inside ourselves, even briefly, a breathing practice supports us in making good boundaries with the external world. We learn to feel the difference between what is inside and what is outside our bodies.
- Breathing techniques combined with self-awareness can be practiced anywhere, at any time. They help us stay centered and reduce the reactivity of our personality type.

Receptive practice

The most basic practice, used in many kinds of meditation, is to simply follow the breath without trying to change it. This is called "receptive" practice. By paying attention to the sensation of the breath each time we inhale and exhale, we can tune in to what's happening inside of us and notice our internal state. This will often quiet the mind and help us relax.

By cultivating receptivity, we can open up space inside ourselves for self-reflection. Here we can observe the activity and habits of our personality type – our thoughts, feelings and body states. This practice helps us to become more present to what is really going on. Over time it also helps us become more receptive to other people, which is the key to having good rapport and communication.

There's more room for our empathy and emotional intelligence.

Active practice

In "active" practice, directing our breath can help us mobilize our energy when we need it, and to relax and conserve energy at other times. You have your own individual breathing patterns, but there are general patterns for each Enneagram type. For example, some types breathe well into the chest but not so well into the belly; some do the reverse; and many of us hold tension in the diaphragm, the "muscle" of the breath.

Here are four "active" breathing practices, although depending on your type and experience, some will be more useful than others. See also the specific suggestions for your personality type.

- **Clearing breath**
If you notice you are holding your breath or you have accumulated some tension, a simple technique is to take a big breath, inhaling and expanding into both your belly and chest, and then let it go with a "whoosh" or sigh of relief. (If people look at you strangely or ask "what's wrong," you can let them know everything is fine!)
- **Relaxing breath**
Take big slow breaths down into your belly (not your chest). Imagine that you can go "underneath" any discomfort and gradually slow your system down. Send your energy down into your legs and feet. Even 5-10 of these breaths will make a big difference in calming the nervous system.
- **Energizing breath**
When you need to bring more energy to your system, take some big breaths up into your chest. Extend the inhalation and stretch your diaphragm and rib cage, then relax as you exhale. Don't use your neck or shoulders to help. (Stop if you get light-headed.)
- **Counter anxiety breath**
For those times when you are feeling anxious and belly breathing doesn't do the job, take a deep breath into your solar plexus. As you inhale, stretch the diaphragm open like a big rubber band. Instead of releasing the exhalation, hold it back against your gently pursed lips and let it out slowly (like holding the end of a balloon). Try to relax your chest and diaphragm while you exhale. The exhalation should be 4 to 5 times longer than the inhalation. You can slowly count if that is helpful.

Touch supports the breath

By placing a hand or two on your chest, over your diaphragm or on your belly, you will encourage breathing

in that area. When appropriate, touching another person can help them deepen their breathing. Resting a hand on their back or shoulders is often more easily accepted than a hand on the front of the body.

Type-Specific Breathing Practices

Type One

Ones are “body types” with a good sense of “knowing” in their belly center, but they may not be consciously aware of this resource. They can develop a lot of physical tension in the effort to get things right. In Ones we see a pattern of “top down” control, which involves chronic holding patterns around the jaw, neck and shoulders. The diaphragm is also an important control center. Their breathing, even when full, may be impeded on both the inhalation and the exhalation.

If you are a One, your task is to practice physical relaxation and allow the pleasure of the life force without trying to control everything. In Enneagram terms, this means traveling the line to Point Seven, which is your heart/security point. However, this may well bring up anxiety; there may be “unacceptable” feelings and impulses that arise. The inner critic is likely to jump into action. It's important to bring self-acceptance and ease the right/wrong dichotomy. You must stay friendly to yourself! At first, practicing relaxation in the middle of the day, or in the middle of work, may be disorienting. It gets easier with practice.

Suggestions for conscious breathing practice:

The key is relaxing the diaphragm. Try going slow and steady on the inhale, gently stretching the diaphragm and rib cage. Then let go on the exhale as best you can, without pushing or holding back. If you experience anxiety, try to spread energy and sensation around the body. Or switch to slow breathing in the belly, not breathing up into the chest. If anxiety persists, practice the “counter-anxiety breath” described in the overview. You can also try making movements or sounds that help you “shake out” and loosen up.

Type Two

Twos are feeling-based types whose energy and attention extends forward to make contact with people. Their great capacity for empathizing with others can become a problem if they match and absorb the emotional state of the other and lose contact with their own feelings and sensations. Twos tend to breath into the chest rather than the belly and may feel cut off at the diaphragm. They can also suspend their breathing for moments while waiting for a positive response from the person they are with.

If you are a Two, your task is to bring attention to the interior landscape of personal needs, feelings and sensations. In Enneagram terms, this means traveling to Point Four, your heart/security point. You may find your

inner critic saying “you are being selfish!” But know that it's important for you and the people around you that you become more (self) centered. This will help in making boundaries and separating your needs and feelings from those of others.

Suggestions for conscious breathing practice:

Bring your attention to the inside by following the physical sensation of your breath. Notice what is happening. For a few moments, try not to think about anyone else and keep your focus on yourself. Practice taking slow, full breaths down into the belly (not so much into the chest). To establish your contact with the ground, send your energy down into your legs and feet. If you start to feel overwhelmed, bring your attention back out and notice things in your physical environment. You can also get up and move around a bit. When you are with other people, remember to feel your own breath and physical sensations.

Type Three

Threes are feeling types whose attention moves out to meet the expectations of other people and the tasks to be done in order to achieve success. They are very high-energy people, constantly on the go, moving from activity to the next. It's not easy for them to bring attention inward to their own feelings. Threes build up a lot of energy in the area of their chests. They fit the description of the “Type A” style, meaning that they are often assertive and impatient, and pressure may build up around the heart.

If you are a Three, a good task is to slow down and practice focusing your attention on what's happening inside. This may seem like a waste of time, but it will bring you into contact with your deeper self and your real priorities. In Enneagram terms, this means traveling to your heart/security point of Six. This relaxation of your type structure will support both your personal health and your effectiveness in working with others. Remember that it takes time and self-acceptance to know your own feelings and develop a relationship with your inner self.

Suggestions for conscious breathing practice:

Take a few moments (or longer) to follow the sensation of your breath. Focus on breathing deeply into the belly rather than the chest. It's important to soften your assertive stance and spread the energy around your body. Try to surrender as much as possible as you exhale, letting yourself relax and let go. This practice is not so much about doing, but simply allowing the rhythms of the body. Here the goal is to feel the life force inside you without moving forward to accomplish anything. This will open up space for both your emotions and your emotional intelligence.

Type Four

Fours are feeling types with an intense emotional life, which can lead to big ups and downs. They alternate between striving to win recognition from others and going deeply into their interior world to find personal authenticity. As romantic idealists, they seek a personal and meaningful connection to their work and other people. But when things do not measure up, they easily become disappointed and tend to withdraw. On the other hand, when they are excited, anxious or full of feelings, they tend to “spill out” into their environment.

If you are a Four, your task is to establish balance with your emotions and your relationships. A focus on the breath and physical sensation will help ground you and connect you to the vitality of your instincts. In Enneagram terms, this means traveling to the heart/security point of One, which will increase your capacity to stay on track in daily life. Expressive activities – dancing, singing or crafts, etc. – channel emotional energy while helping you stay grounded in your body.

Suggestions for conscious breathing practice:

Focus on a balance between breathing in and breathing out. If you have a strong Three wing, you are likely to build up energy in your chest and hold back on the exhalation. So practice taking slow, deep breaths and letting go on the exhalation to release tension in the chest and diaphragm. If you have a strong Five wing, you may not be taking in enough air, so practice breathing into your chest (as well as your belly) to build more energy. Whatever your predominant wing, the goal is to access calm, steady breathing that can be contained inside the body but does not over-charge your system. Use the counter-anxiety breath described in the overview when necessary.

Type Five

Fives are thinking types who seek to develop knowledge and expertise while protecting their privacy and autonomy. They need lots of personal space. The big question is how much alone time is truly necessary for well-being, and when does it become an escape or avoidance. Even while being with people, Fives may seem overly “detached” and lacking in personal warmth and rapport. Because thinking is so central, it's easy to rely too much on the mental center of intelligence at the expense of the other two centers.

If you are a Five, your task is to establish greater contact with your body and your emotions. Everyone unconsciously tends to hold their breath to avoid feelings or sensations that seem scary or overwhelming. But as a chronic defensive strategy, this constricts your vitality and keeps you in your head. This may seem safe, but being in your body offers a new kind of security. In Enneagram terms, this means traveling to your heart/security point of Eight. You can access the abundant energy of your

instincts, increase your capacity for pleasure and sensation, and make better contact with other people and the physical environment.

Suggestions for conscious breathing practice:

Focus on slowly expanding your diaphragm and deepening your breath. You may feel uncomfortable or even anxious at first. But take it one step, one breath at a time, learning to tolerate increased sensation. With continued practice you will increase your capacity for vitality. Breathing into the belly will develop your capacity to be more grounded. Breathing into the chest will open up space for both your personal feelings and your empathy, with more possibility of a heart connection with others.

Type Six

Sixes are mental types who use their keen perception to anticipate problems, find solutions, and establish rules and procedures that create safety and security. Some Sixes are cautious and hold back from decisions or tasks, while others take a position of physical or intellectual strength and jump into action. But all Sixes have a very sensitive neurological “alarm” system that puts them on high alert when there are signals of danger. However, often the danger is imagined or amplified beyond what is really true.

If you are a Six, your task is to develop safety within yourself instead of relying on other people to provide this for you. The journey of a Six is moving from fear to courage, which is supported by becoming centered and grounded in your body. In Enneagram terms, this means traveling to the heart/security point of Nine. Here you can relax your scanning of the environment, your energy shifts to the belly center, and you become calmer and more available for a harmonious connection with yourself and others.

Suggestions for conscious breathing practice:

Take slow, deep breaths and stretch the actual muscle of your diaphragm, then release the exhalation as much as possible. It's important to notice when your alarm system is activated for the fight, flight or freeze response. Breathing into the belly will help restore calm and reduce anxiety. Allow pleasurable sensations to build. Breathing into the chest will provide more energy to handle difficulties and challenges when necessary. When you find yourself over-thinking or worrying and holding your breath, return to the practice of steady breathing.

Type Seven

Sevens are mental types who thrive on multiple options, creative thinking, and new possibilities for fun and adventure. Of all the types, they are the best at handling the large amounts of information and stimuli that characterize our modern society. Yet they can become dispersed, less able to focus on one thing at a time or to

follow up on commitments, since there is always another idea or pleasurable activity that beckons. Sevens hate limits, and to be in the body is to experience limitation (as well as pleasure). Their somatic pattern is “up and out” rather than “down and in.”

If you are a Seven, your task is to balance your tendency to be “upwardly displaced” with coming down into the body and feelings. This doesn’t seem like fun at first, but it will open up a whole new realm of experience. Use a self-awareness practice to calm the activity of your mind and bring attention to the inside. In Enneagram terms, this means traveling to the heart/security point of Five. Things quiet down, you develop interiority and the ability to self-reflect. This increases your ability to focus on priorities, feel your feelings and develop your capacity for empathy and emotional intelligence.

Suggestions for conscious breathing practice:

Breathe into your belly, notice physical sensation in your lower body, and feel your feet on the ground. Imagine you are extending roots down into the earth. When you notice you have left your body for the pleasures (or worries) of the mind, practice dropping back down to your belly and feet. At first you might find that you can only do this for a few moments, but your capacity will increase over time. Paying attention to your breath – either through an active or receptive practice – will help you slow down and focus in work and relationships.

Type Eight

Eights are an assertive, body-based type with good access to their instinctual energy. Eights strive for justice in a world they see as unfair. Natural leaders, they adopt a position of strength to protect themselves, their territory and their people. It’s easy for them to access their anger, but harder to express more vulnerable feelings. Under pressure, Eights usually toughen up, which results in physical tension and “armoring.” With their high energy and enthusiasm, Eights tend to over-exert and over-consume, which creates an excessive style.

If you are an Eight, your task is to relax and soften your position of strength in order to tune into your feelings and open your heart center. In Enneagram terms, this means traveling to your heart/security point of Two. This may bring up fear or anxiety, but it has many benefits if you can stay the course. It will increase your emotional receptivity and empathy, opening up new possibilities for mutuality in relationships. Friends, colleagues and intimates can step in closer to provide care and support. At the same time, having more emotional intelligence will make you a more effective leader.

Suggestions for conscious breathing practice:

Focus on managing your breath as appropriate to the situation at hand. Avoid “powering up” with chest breathing as an automatic response. Instead, practice

breathing into your belly to calm down and relax (like taking 10 slow breaths when you find yourself getting angry). Before you react to a situation, follow your breath “down and in,” and tune into what you are feeling and sensing inside. This pause will help you be less excessive and more flexible. When you have “big energy” in your body, practice relaxing fully on the exhalation, letting go of control for moments at a time.

Type Nine

Nines are a body-based type who paradoxically can be out of touch with their bodies. The intuition and common sense of the belly center is operating, but they aren’t necessarily paying attention. Nines are the mediators and peacemakers of the world. With a goal of harmonious living, they easily blend with other people, nature or technology. Conflict feels uncomfortable, even painful, so they do their best to avoid it. In the interest of staying comfortable, they tend to space out on difficult emotions and personal priorities. Their anger often turns into stubbornness.

If you are a Nine, your task is to get out of the comfort zone and get into action on behalf of your true priorities. This can take the form of being more assertive with people, or taking on a difficult task. In Enneagram terms, this means traveling to your heart/security point of Three. Here you have plenty of energy for getting things done, in order of importance, and you are more direct in your communication with others. You know what you want; you have a clear agenda. There is more activity in your emotional center. This may bring up discomfort and anxiety at first, but will get easier with practice.

Suggestions for conscious breathing practice:

Use a conscious breath practice to tune into your body, your feelings and your intuition. You can find important information and guidance close at hand. Being in touch with your own internal experience also will help create boundaries. You will know better what you want and need instead of simply going along with others. As you practice breathing into your chest, you can increase your physical energy and vitality. Resist the tendency to lower your energy level by belly breathing or by dispersing your energy through comfortable but non-essential tasks, over-talking, or over-consuming food, TV, etc.

[http://www.enneagramwork.com/breathing-practices.html](http://www enneagramwork.com/breathing-practices.html)
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