

5 mindful breathing techniques that are key to employee wellness in 2022

Most South Africans returned to work this week embarking on yet another year of hustle, fast-paced deadlines, and the stress that comes with all-round adulting.



Source: Supplied

And yet when we are overwhelmed, remembering to breathe may very well be the key to managing stress levels at the workplace in 2022, whether working from home or the office.

We breathe daily and nightly. Our breathing is so natural we often forget that we are doing it. It may seem like a strange thing to remind ourselves to breathe because why would we need to remember to breathe if our biology has got it covered for us, right?

But the wonder of conscious breathing and our ability to use it to shape our physical and mental well-being is astounding, and probably the least appreciated of stress-management techniques.

"Our breath, our prana, our life force, is a powerful tool that, if practised regularly, can benefit our general physical and mental health, reduce stress, improve posture, improve quality of sleep, and more. The wonderful thing is that our breathing system is always with us so we can practise conscious breathing anywhere and anytime, and it can be a very useful tool, especially when life gets challenging," says Joëlle Sleetbos, head of Yoga at Virgin Active.



"As new-borns, the very first action we take is inhaling. It is quite literally this initial massive breath that brings us to life. From that day forward, with every full cycle of our breath we are in a position to change the chemistry in our body, control our heart rate, and ultimately manage our emotions. We just need to invest the time, and engage our respiratory system regularly so that we condition ourselves to breathe consciously."

Sleebos offers the following 5 mindful breathing exercises to take into the new year, to maintain focus on calmness and health in 2022.

#1 – Mindful breathing

This type of exercise doesn't involve manipulating your breath at all. It is simply about being aware of its natural rhythm and deepening it through gentle focus.

Begin by breathing normally and then tune into a physical cue such as the rise and fall of your chest or the feeling of the air through your nostrils. Your mind will wander naturally, but as soon as it does, refocus on your cue and continue to be as mindful of the rhythm as you can to heighten your awareness, eliminate distractions and quiet a racing mind.



Source: [Pxabay](#)

#2 – Equal breathing

This type of breathing stems from the ancient practice of Pranayama Yoga. Essentially all you are doing is inhaling for the same amount of time that you're exhaling. Making your breath smooth and steady can help bring about balance and serenity.

Sit comfortably on a cushion or a chair, making sure your spine is neutral.

Take a few natural breaths to centre yourself.

Slowly count 1-2-3-4 as you inhale through your nose.

Then exhale for the same 4 second count. You can exhale out of your nose or mouth.

As you inhale and exhale be aware of the feelings of fullness and emptiness in your lungs.

#3 – Purse lipped breathing

This simple breathing technique helps you slow down the pace of your breathing by applying a deliberate effort in each breath.

Sit comfortably on a cushion or a chair, making sure your spine is neutral.

Take a few natural breaths to centre yourself.

Keeping your mouth closed, inhale slowly through your nose for 2 counts.

Purse your lips as though you were going to whistle.

Exhale slowly by blowing air through your pursed lips for a count of 4.

#4 – Alternate nostril breathing

Alternate nostril breathing, known as Nadi Shodhana Pranayama in Sanskrit, is a breathing practice for relaxation and balance, and has also been shown to enhance cardiovascular function and to lower heart rate. It cultivates balance between the right and left sides of your brain.

Sit comfortably on a cushion or a chair, making sure your spine is neutral.

Take a few natural breaths to centre yourself.

Lift your right hand toward your nose, pressing your first and middle fingers down toward your palm and leaving your other fingers extended.

After an exhale, use your right thumb to gently close your right nostril.

Inhale through your left nostril and then close your left nostril with your right pinkie and ring fingers.

Release your thumb and exhale out through your right nostril.

Inhale through your right nostril and then close this nostril.

Release your fingers to open your left nostril and exhale through this side.

This is one cycle.

Continue this breathing pattern for up to 5 minutes.

Finish your session with an exhale on the left side.



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#5 – Sitali breathing

This Yoga-inspired breathing practice helps you lower your body temperature and calm your mind.

Sit comfortably on a cushion or a chair, making sure your spine is neutral.

Take a few natural breaths to centre yourself.

Then, curling your tongue and extending it out a little, inhale through the tunnel of the tongue.

Release the tongue, close the mouth and exhale out through the nose.

Continue breathing like this for up to 5 minutes.

So, the next time life feels overwhelming, why not close your eyes and take a deep breath...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joëlle Sleebos, head of Yoga at Virgin Active.

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