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# Goodbye Anxiety, Hello Pranayama

Pranayama is the ancient art of breath control. Authors have suggested that breath controls the psyche (1, 2). Imagine you are afraid or surprised, happy or excited, nervous or scared. How does your breath change with each emotional experience? The psyche, emotions and breath are all linked according to yogic philosophy. If tests, public speaking or any other experiences make you anxious, you already have the tools to overcome these negative experiences. Your breath can unlock the door to a less anxious approach to the experiences you will inevitably encounter in life. Learning how to manage the breath in various circumstances will allow you to face life's many unexpected circumstances with more confidence and assurance!

## Steps of Ocean-Sounding Breath

You can practice breath control anywhere, without other people knowing you're doing it. You can be sitting, standing, walking, running or falling asleep.

1. Consciously tune in to the pattern of your breath. (If you are in a place where you feel comfortable to do so, you may want to place one hand over your belly, one hand over your chest and close your eyes; feel the breath moving in and out.)
2. Keep your awareness on the breath until you can feel it evenly balanced and smooth on the inhale and exhale.
3. Place the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth. Continue breathing normally, bringing awareness to your breath pattern.
4. Soften your face and release tension from your jaw.
5. Create space between your ears and shoulders by releasing tension in your shoulders and drawing your backbones (scapulae) down your back, a motion which pushes the chest up and out slightly and relaxes the belly.
6. Breathe in through your nose, lengthening the inhale.
7. Breathe out through your mouth, keeping the tongue on the roof of the mouth. Lengthen through the exhale.
8. Listen to the sound your breath makes. As you continue to inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth, the breath becomes ocean-sounding, but it's likely that only you or someone right next to you could hear it. (It might sound like the ocean when you put your ear up to a large seashell.)
9. Continue to breathe in and out this way for 5 minutes at first, moving up to 10 and 15 minutes or more over time.
10. Remind yourself to relax your face, draw your shoulders down and pay conscious attention to your breath throughout the day, as you perform different activities. As you become familiar and comfortable with the feeling, it's a good idea to consciously focus on the breath before exams or public speaking events. It will help relax you, and research has shown that test performance increases when a person feels more relaxed and comfortable in mind and body (3, 4).



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Remember: Stress is natural and sometimes a necessary part of life, but there are always safe ways to help reduce its negative effects!