



Square Breathing

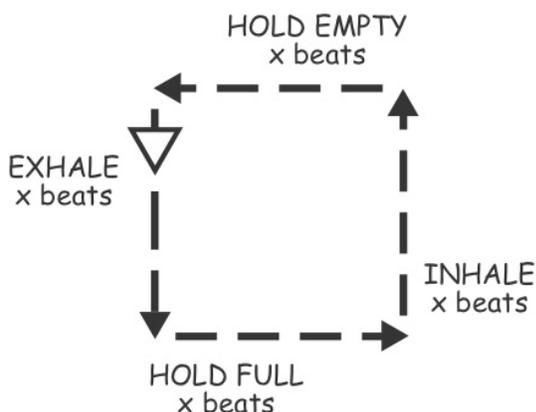
Excerpted from *Issues in Your Tissues: Heal Body and Emotion from the Inside Out*, by Denise LaBarre, rev. ed

The wisest one-word sentence? Breathe. ~ Terri Guillemets

Throughout the ages, humans have used counted breathing practices to expand their concentration and inner awareness. Counting beats while you breathe keeps the mind occupied and the breath steady. A beat can be taken as one heart beat or one second, but the point is the *ratio* of time spent inhaling, exhaling and holding, not the speed. The focus is on quality not quantity so six fast beats are not necessarily better than four slow, even ones. If you are already comfortable with belly breathing, you may want to try a counted breath to deepen your breathing practice.

I do what I call “square breathing” because it makes sense to me to balance each of the four parts of the breath equally, and I like how it feels. I first met this pattern in a yoga class and got frustrated when I couldn’t manage the eight slow beats the instructor counted out. Then I realized it’s simply a lengthened 1:1:1:1 ratio pattern and re-timed it to work for me. I started out with a four-beat “square” and have gradually increased the duration of each “side.” If I neglect my practice for a while, I go back to four beats and start building again from there.

Instruction – Make sure you aren’t wearing clothes that restrict your belly from moving in and out fully. If you are not practiced at full-belly breathing, please refer to Chapter One in



my book.* Start by exhaling completely and slowly. Gently squeeze your belly muscles to push a little more air out of the lungs. Don’t strain. Then breathe in for two beats, hold the breath for two beats, exhale for two beats, and hold the belly and lungs empty for two beats. Repeat. It will take a few “squares” for the breath to settle and even out. If two beats feels too short, gradually lengthen the sides until it



feels right. Once you get the squares even, see if you can continue for five minutes, or at least twelve breaths. Don't do more than you are comfortable with. You can start with any number of beats – you will find your comfort level pretty quickly. You want to push yourself a little to open as much as you can sustain with a smile in your heart. If you have never done this kind of thing before, be patient with yourself. Start gently and work up to as many beats per side as feels good. Do this for five minutes per session and see where you take it from there. Bedtime is a great time to practice. Also try it in the middle of the night if you wake up and have trouble going back to sleep.

There are many advanced breathing patterns out there, each with its own esoteric merits. Some patterns emphasize either the inhalation or the exhalation, or leave out either the full hold or empty hold. Inhalation builds energy and exhalation dissipates it. So keep in mind that if one phase is proportionally longer or more vigorous, it is emphasized. Advanced breathing practices can have a powerful calming or enervating effect in the body, and like anything that has power, what might be good for one person, may not be good for another. For example, holding the breath for several beats after inhalation is great for building energy, but is contraindicated for someone with high blood pressure. Don't do anything that feels wrong for you or push yourself too far. Take on what feels right to you and build gradually. Keep it simple enough that you'll stick with it. Just get started.

Breathing fully may feel strange at first but as you practice it will gradually feel normal and you'll feel really great doing it. It took time for your habit of shallow breathing to get that entrenched, and it will take time and practice to deepen it. Each time you notice yourself breathing shallowly, say to yourself, "Great, another opportunity to shift the habit. Breathe from the belly." Once you have that down, you can try to breathe deeply in stressful situations. I started training myself to take a deep breath before I intervened if my kids' arguing escalated. Then I noticed magic happening. More often than not, I wound up not feeling the need to intervene at all and they settled it themselves.

The next chance you get, watch a healthy infant breathe. You will see the belly puffing out and the little toes and fingers moving as the energy flows in. You will be watching a natural master. Feel free to be inspired and instructed. ;-)

Sometimes it helps to picture your breath as life-giving water and your body as the garden. If you don't breath fully, your garden is parched. It's not something you do once and then



you're finished. A garden needs water continually; your body needs full breath-energy, again and again, every so-many seconds. Give yourself that drink of energy. Water your garden.

People ask me if it's better to breathe through the nose or mouth. For our purposes here, any way you can breathe fully is great. Refinements can come later. When I first learned this, I breathed through my mouth because my nose and sinuses were usually congested. As my sinuses cleared, I began to take in breath through my nose. The goal is simply a deep, full breath. Do what works for you – and do it often.

**Issues in Your Tissues: Heal Body and Emotion from the Inside Out. [Available on Amazon](#), etc.*



QUOTES for Inspiration:

He lives most life whoever breathes most air. ~ Elizabeth Barrett Browning

When you own your breath, nobody can steal your peace. ~ Unknown

There is one way of breathing that is shameful and constricted. Then, there's another way: a breath of love that takes you all the way to infinity. ~ Rumi

Breathing in, I calm body and mind. Breathing out, I smile. Dwelling in the present moment I know this is the only moment. ~ Thích Nhất Hạnh

Fear is excitement without the breath. ~ Fritz Perls

I always love that phrase, 'Oh, this is a good idea, but it's execution dependent.' As if anything in life is not execution dependent. Breathing is execution-dependent. ~ Ted Sarandos