

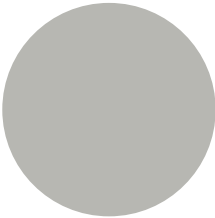
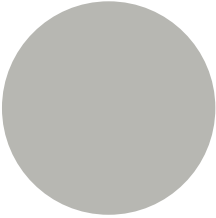


BREATH GAMES

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There is nothing but currents and jams.

Jiří Zbořil, Praha, Lipová 2025



BREATH GAMES

INTRODUCTION

Read the following paragraphs to the end. Then try what the text suggests.

Sit quietly and pay attention to your nose. Notice which nostril feels more open at this moment. Don't try to change anything. Just make a mental note.

Now place your hands in front of your chest at a comfortable distance, palms facing you. Keep your attention on the sensations in your nose. Then inhale and gently bend your wrists a little away from you. Just a little. Notice the change of pressure in your nose. Make a mental note.

Then bend your wrists slightly towards you. Again, pay attention to the changes in your nose. Breathe in and out. Keep slowly bending your wrists, first one hand, then the other, then both. Try a small range of motion, then a larger one. All the while, keep noticing how the pressure in your nose shifts.

Play with it for as long as you like. When you've had enough, check your nostrils again. Is the dominant one still as dominant as before? Are they more even? Did they switch? Make a mental note. And if you want to know what comes next, turn the page. If you didn't enjoy this exercise, the rest of the booklet may not be for you.

After years of trying to understand the inner mechanics of breath, something eventually shifted for me. One day, I randomly explored how small motions of one part of my body affect weirdly distant ones, and all of a sudden noticed my nose. I kept exploring, and had come across things. I stopped falling asleep during breath exercises. I stopped losing interest. I started enjoying it. And that joy made it easier to keep going. I began playing with the breath in ways that made sense to me, exploring how to use it in daily life. And then I decided to put all those bits and pieces together and give it some shape. I did it for myself but am happy to share. However, be aware that there is no definitive shape to it. It is a path rather than a tool. If you want to set off for the journey I suggest you print these pages out and jot your own observations down along the way. There is a lot of space left for them intentionally. I actually still keep doing the same and cannot see the end of it.

THE NOSE WORK

Have you noticed that you usually use one nostril more than the other?

Can you switch the active nostril?

Can you make the airflow perfectly equal?

Can you force a closed side to open just because you want it to?

You probably can't. Isn't it interesting?

The nose moves in slow, automatic cycles: one side opens, the other softens, and eventually they switch. Try to control it for a moment and feel how difficult it is. Once you have felt, keep noticing it. Noticing something this small and physical is more grounding than trying to "observe your breath" as a whole. It gives your attention a real place to rest.

To start, breathe as you normally breathe and place your attention at the entrance of the nose.

Which side feels open?

Which side feels quiet?

Can you make the space inside a little bit bigger?

Can you change the pressure? Especially in the closed one. How do you work around it?

Remember the introduction. Tiny movements change the airflow, often immediately. Do not manipulate anything, just observe how the body works. Try other small experiments and pay attention to what is happening in your nose. Any tiny change counts.

RELAX YOUR JAW.

The quiet nostril often opens slightly.

LIFT YOUR CHEST BY ONE CENTIMETER.

The airflow becomes clearer.

PULL YOUR SHOULDERS BACK AND DOWN.

Sometimes the dominant side switches.

STRAIGHTEN YOUR SPINE FROM THE LOWER BACK.

This can widen the passage deep inside the nose.

**PRESS THE TONGUE GENTLY AGAINST THE ROOF OF
YOUR MOUTH.**

It softens the inhale.

LEAN YOUR TORSO SLIGHTLY FORWARD.

The closed side may open a little.

ROTATE YOUR HEAD A FEW DEGREES LEFT OR RIGHT.

Even a tiny rotation changes the balance.

LET YOURSELF HALF-YAWN.

Pressure shifts, airflow changes.

RELAX THE MUSCLES AROUND YOUR EYES.

The nose responds instantly.

PRESS YOUR LIPS TOGETHER AND RELEASE.

The release often broadens the passage.

TIGHTEN YOUR FOREARMS AS IF GRIPPING SOMETHING.

The nasal flow usually narrows.

COMPLETELY SOFTEN YOUR FOREARMS AND PALMS.

The quiet nostril often opens.

LIFT YOUR ARMS A FEW CENTIMETRES FROM YOUR SIDES.

Sometimes it opens the upper chest and clears the nose.

ROTATE YOUR WRISTS UPWARD.

Small movement, big effect.

**REST YOUR PALMS ON YOUR THIGHS WITH MAXIMUM
SOFTNESS.**

The nose often responds with more space.

Why does the nose react to the back, ribs, arms and hands? Mechanics. The inside of the nose is part of a physical chain, and a very sensitive part at that.

Everything is connected through various tissues. You can try even your feet. But there is a catch. Something works today but may not be working tomorrow. Something works for someone but remains completely void for someone else.

Because so long as you live, your body is different every time you notice it.

The nasal cycle changes.

Your posture changes.

Your tension changes.

Your breath changes.

Your mind changes.

A movement that opened a nostril today might do nothing tomorrow. Another movement may suddenly work for no clear reason. There is no universal trick. No prescribed exercise except for the game.

Try, test, feel, adjust. No expectations. Just curiosity about how your own body behaves. Your configuration is always yours. Focusing on your nose pays off. It tells you a lot about yourself. It helps to overcome hard times. It helps to concentrate. It helps to relax. Because it brings you closer to the only important thing that really matters, more important than any worries. And far more powerful, too. To your breath.

THE SHAPES OF BREATH

When you think of it, there are three parts to the breath you can shape: inhale, exhale, and the pauses between them. Each tends to influence the body differently. In general, inhale lifts, exhale settles, and pauses intensify whatever came before them. The effects are not absolute and not always predictable. They depend on tempo, softness, context, and the person breathing.

In general, there are six basic directions: six ways the breath can organize the body. Everything else is a variation in speed and softness.

I. EVEN SHAPE

Inhale – o – Exhale – o

(1-o-1-o · 2-o-2-o · 3-o-3-o)

Equal inhale and exhale, no intentional pauses.

Effect

Symmetry creates predictability. Thoughts stop scattering. Attention steadies.

2. EXHALE-EXTENDED SHAPE

Inhale – o – Exhale – o

(1-o-2-o · 2-o-4-o)

Longer exhale, gentle downward motion.

Effect

The mind slows without dullness. Urgency fades.

3. INHALE-EXTENDED SHAPE

Inhale – o – Exhale – o

(3-o-2-o · 4-o-2-o)

A longer inhale forms an upward curve.

Effect

Clarity returns. Morning heaviness lifts.

4. ASCENT SHAPE

Inhale – Pause – Exhale – o

(x-y-x-o, with y = any pause length)

Like a little push. The breath reaches the top and holds for a moment.

Effect

The longer the pause, the stronger the sense of intensity; the shorter the pause, the gentler the lift. Focus intensifies.

5. DESCENT SHAPE

Inhale – o – Exhale – Pause

(x–o–y–z, with z = any pause length)

A downward slope.

Effect

The longer the pause, the deeper the descent. Muscles loosen. Thoughts lose edges.

6. BOX SHAPE

Inhale – Pause – Exhale – Pause

(1-1-1-1 · 2-2-2-2 · 3-3-3-3)

Equal phases, full structure.

Effect

Equal phases create structure. Internal monologue slows. Attention becomes deliberate.

That's all you need. Follow the direction. Adjust the tempo. Keep the breath soft. Or don't, up to you. I deliberately talk only about shapes, not speed. That is very individual, and you have to figure it out for yourself and any given situation. Try it in different moments. Notice what happens. Let yourself explore. In the following pages you will find everyday situations with hints for basic patterns to use. Take them as basic stepping stones to begin the journey. There is nothing dogmatic about them, and the list surely is not complete. It is only meant to provide you with some firm referential points. You need to find your own ways and you may even find your own patterns, combinations of shapes that work better for your body. Do not bother yourself to check them all. Pick some that are most relevant to you, and try them out. Breath is always available. Just working with it is already a shift.

Sometimes I count the four parts of the breath using my heartbeat. It gives an extra layer of feedback and more to think about.

FEAR

Shape: Exhale-extended (slow, steady) > Box

Fear arrives as a tightening in the chest and a sudden lift inside the body, as if the breath tries to escape before you do.

There is no point in fighting or reasoning with it. Just give the exhale enough length to find the ground again. You are not trying to relax, only to make space for the body to feel where it is. When the exhale becomes one smooth line, fear stops breaking the breath into pieces. The body stops running. Direction quietly returns.

Box breathing then provides some structure to protect the gained ground.

ANGER

Shape: Exhale-extended

Anger is fear that didn't know where to go. It rises quickly and tries to push through the chest. The breath sharpens; the body prepares to move faster than the situation needs. You soften the system not by suppressing the heat, but by making the exhale just long enough for the pressure to drain. The emotion follows the breath downward. As the exhale grows wider, the system stops leaning forward. You see more clearly where you are and what actually matters.

RESTLESSNESS

Shape: Even > Box

Restlessness is scattered activation, energy without direction. Attention moving faster than the breath can follow. Again, there is no point in using force. Better give the body a simple rhythm: inhale and exhale of the same length. Nothing to solve. Nothing to push. Symmetry gives the system one stable line. The breath stops jumping between impulses. Thoughts fall into a quieter order which you can fix by extending the symmetry of breath with pauses at both ends.

OVERTHINKING

Shape: Exhale-extended (gentle) > Descent

Overthinking is restlessness that climbed upward. The breath stays high; the chest becomes the mind's echo chamber. You can invite the system back down by softening the exhale. Not too long to feel heavy, just long enough to widen the space under the diaphragm. Thoughts lose their sharp edge. The body makes room again for perspective. Descent shape gives it an anchor.

SADNESS

Shape: Even (slow)

Sadness folds the chest inward. The breath becomes narrow, as if protecting something soft. Instead of lifting or calming it, just give it some room. A slow, even breath creates space for the weight without pushing it away. Symmetry keeps you from collapsing further inward. The breath widens around the feeling, the point is not to remove it, but to let it move.

FATIGUE

Shape: Inhale-extended

Fatigue is low tone in the whole system. Nothing is wrong, but nothing wants to start. A longer inhale gives the body a simple upward curve. Not too long though. Better than to activate sharply, you just try to return a bit of structure to the muscles and clarity to the mind. As the inhale widens, tone returns.

FOCUS

Shape: Inhale-extended (sharper)

Focus is more of a direction than effort. You enter it by making the inhale slightly longer and slightly cleaner than usual. The body lifts just enough to narrow attention, but not too much to create pressure. As the inhale sets the line, distractions fall away.

PAIN

Shape: Inhale-extended (broad, soft)

You can't breathe the pain away. You can only create space around it, a wider inhale, soft and steady, without holding at the top. Sometimes the pain becomes clearer, smaller, less consuming. The breath returns to places the contraction had taken.

CONFLICT AFTERMATH

Shape: Exhale-extended + tiny descent pause

After conflict, the body stays half-ready to react. The mind may have finished the conversation, but the nervous system didn't. You let the exhale grow longer, and at the end you allow a small pause, only long enough for the system to notice that nothing more is happening. The breath settles before the mind does. Replay loops soften.

MORNING START

Shape: Inhale-extended (ascending tempo)

Morning is unshaped. The body is present but not yet organised. You begin by letting the inhale widen a little more with each breath. Make it soft, just a gradual rise the system can follow. As the inhale climbs, tone returns. The day begins without shock, without heaviness.

PRE-SLEEP

Shape: Descent

Sleep is a slope rather than a sudden switch. A long, unbroken exhale followed by a soft pause lowers the whole system. Don't try to feel sleepy. Just let the breath fall downward until the body no longer wants to rise. Muscles release, thoughts dissolve. The boundary between waking and rest opens.

BASIC ACTIVATION

Shape: Ascent (short pause)

Activation is tone rather than energy. A clean inhale with a brief pause at the top gives the system just enough upward intent to begin something: a task, a sentence, a movement. The pause is short, almost invisible. Just a moment of holding the line. The body lifts. Beginning becomes simple.

COGNITIVE START

Shape: Even > Ascent

Thought needs order before it needs direction. Start with a few even breaths to stabilise the system. Then follow with gentle ascents to narrow the channel of attention. When the rhythm is steady and the tone is clean, the mind aligns with the breath. Thought moves in one line instead of many.

CREATIVE RESET

Shape: Box (slow)

When thinking collapses into sameness, the breath can reintroduce structure. A slow box breath creates four equal edges, a quiet frame the mind cannot ignore. As the breath moves through the square, thought reopens. New directions appear in the created space.

A short note at the end.

The patterns above are not suggestions for thirty-minute exercises. Give them a minute or two. Give them as much as you want, or as much as you can in the given moment.

Don't try to push the pattern until the desired effect appears. It doesn't work that way. The effect usually comes with a delay. Most often it takes time before you even notice it, and sometimes it is different than intended. I once wanted to get up and breathed myself straight into another round of sleep.

Also there is no need to bother oneself with correct positioning of the body. When you stay with your breath long enough your body will find the best position on its own.

Think of it as a game.

Don't go for an achievement.

Ease off and be with your breath.

The booklet grew out of small experiments I started when working on the book of my fear. The deeper I went into the observations, the more the breath kept returning as the quiet axis around which everything moves. So this, in a way, is the final point of it: the part that reveals itself only through practice. And since you have made it this far, here is the gate of all my secrets thus far: the exercises and thinking about how breath works are nothing but a scaffolding. The real pleasure comes when you simply breathe consciously and at the same time let the breath do its job on its own. Ultimately, your body doesn't need to count. It needs you to be with it and let it be at the same time. But for some reason, this feels like a tall order, and one of the ways to it may be counting ins and outs. So good luck with it.

*The breath is free, because the breath is free.
Working with fear always asks something of you. If you
want to explore that path, you can find some hints at
<https://fuckthefear.net/Book>*

