

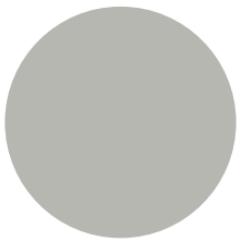
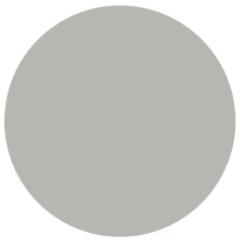


BREATH GAMES

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There is nothing but currents and gaps.

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 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.

Welcome to a small gate into another world — literally, though not at all mystically.

After many years of trying to understand the inner logic of breath — listening to pranayama teachers, Buddhists, Taoists, mentors, guides, reading breath books, and repeatedly failing to make the breath behave for my restless mind — something finally shifted.

Surprisingly, it was ChatGPT that pointed me to the kind of experiment I just asked you to try. For some reason, it worked. I stopped falling asleep. I stopped losing interest. I started enjoying it. And that enjoyment 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 now, at this point, I feel ready to share what I've found — in an organized way.

THE NOSE WORK

This short guide is an invitation to return to the simplest rhythm of being — not to fix anything, but to feel what is already here. When you follow your breath with attention, the world becomes quieter and wider at the same time. And eventually you may shape it a little, if needed. So back to the nose for a short while.

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 far 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?

Start exploring how your body affects the nostrils. Tiny movements change the airflow, often immediately. You’re not manipulating anything; you’re discovering 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? Pure mechanics. The inside of the nose is part of a physical chain, and a very sensitive part at that:

Spine: tiny shifts change rib angles and the space behind the nasal cavity.

Ribs: every movement alters pressure in the upper airways.

Shoulders and arms: they pull on fascia connected to the chest and upper back.

Forearms and hands: tension travels upward through the whole chain.

Jaw and tongue: they shape the throat, and the nose reacts immediately.

Everything is connected — not poetically, but mechanically. 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. Why?

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 repeatable formula. No prescribed exercise but a game.

Try, test, feel, adjust. No expectations. No system.

Just curiosity about how your own body behaves. Your configuration is always yours. But trust me, focusing on your nose pays off. It tells you a lot about yourself. It helps to overcome all hard times. It helps to concentrate. It helps to relax. Why?

Because it brings you closer to the only important thing that really matters, far more important than any worries. And far more powerful, too. To your breath.

THE PARTS OF BREATH

Once you learn to feel the nose — its asymmetry, its cycles, its quiet reactions to small shifts in posture — you can begin to work with the breath itself. There are three parts to it you can shape: the inhale, the exhale, and the pauses in between. Each of them changes the body in a specific way, not through intention or belief or imagination, but through mechanics and chemistry.

A fast, sharp inhale activates the system.

A long, soft exhale settles it.

A pause after a tense inhale can push you toward alertness.

A pause after a soft inhale can bring you deeper into ease.

This is the basic pattern of the autonomic nervous system: sympathetic on the inhale, parasympathetic on the exhale.

But there is more to it. The body doesn't react only to the phase of the breath. It reacts to its quality.

A tense inhale triggers tension. A gentle inhale doesn't. When the inhale is slow, smooth and relaxed, it lowers mechanical stress in the chest and keeps CO₂ levels stable. During the pause that follows, CO₂ rises slightly — a signal your body reads as safety rather than urgency. The result is a quieting effect, even though you are technically "holding the breath after inhaling."

Which brings us to CO₂. You might think of it merely as of a waste product but it is actually one of the key regulators of the breath–nervous system loop. In some respect more important than oxygen which is almost always abundant; the body cares far more about how much CO₂ you retain or lose. High CO₂ within a healthy range calms you and sharpens presence. Low CO₂ from over-breathing makes the body restless, scattered, or anxious. The nervous system is responding to tension and CO₂ drift, not a simplistic inhale/exhale rule. CO₂ is the key messenger here. Breath patterns modify this balance within seconds, which is why they work so quickly in daily life.

THE SHAPES OF BREATH

Once you realize how the four parts of breath — inhale, the pause after inhale, exhale, and the pause after exhale — influence the body, you can begin to work with the shapes they create.

A shape is not a tempo or a count. It is the relationship between the four phases — the way the breath moves through the nervous system.

Every breath has a shape, even when you are not paying attention.

When you breathe consciously, you are simply making that shape intentional.

There are six basic shapes.

They are not techniques, but directions — six ways the breath can organize the body and six ways the body tends to respond.

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.

Physiology
CO₂ stays steady.
Symmetry creates predictability.

Effect
Thoughts stop scattering.
Attention steadies.
The body becomes available.

2. EXHALE-EXTENDED SHAPE

Inhale - o - Exhale - o
(1-o-2-o · 2-o-4-o)

Longer exhale, gentle downward motion.

Physiology
CO₂ rises within a healthy range.
Sympathetic tone drops.

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.

Physiology
Slight sympathetic lift.
Shorter exhale prevents over-activation.

Effect
Clarity returns.
Morning heaviness lifts.

4. ASCENT SHAPE

Inhale – Pause – Exhale – o
(x–y–x–o, with y = any pause length)

A true rise — the breath reaches the top and holds for a moment.

Physiology

Pause after inhale increases sympathetic tone in a controlled way.

The longer the pause, the stronger the activation; the shorter the pause, the gentler the lift.

Effect

Focus intensifies.

The body feels precise.

You begin — not by force, but by tone.

5. DESCENT SHAPE

Inhale – o – Exhale – Pause
(x-o-y-z, with z = any pause length)

A downward slope.

Physiology
Long exhale gradually raises CO₂,
Pause deepens parasympathetic settling.
The longer the pause, the deeper the descent.

Effect
Muscles loosen.
Thoughts lose edges.
The system moves toward rest.

6. BOX SHAPE

Inhale – Pause – Exhale – Pause
(1-1-1-1 • 2-2-2-2 • 3-3-3-3)

Equal phases, full structure.

Physiology

Pause after inhale activates.

Pause after exhale calms.

Together they create a neutral oscillation.

Effect

Internal monologue slows.

Attention becomes deliberate.

Soft tempo calms; sharp tempo overwhelms.

That's all you need. Follow the direction. Adjust the tempo. Keep the breath soft.

Try it in different moments. Notice what happens. Let yourself explore. Below you will find everyday situations with hints for basic patterns to use. Take them as basic stepping stones to begin a journey. There is nothing dogmatic about them. They should only provide you with some firm referential points. You need to find your own way to express them and you may even find your own patterns – shapes that work better for your body. This is not a mistake. It is how the system becomes yours.

The breath is a tool that is always available. 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)

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.

You don't fight it. You don't reason with it. You give the exhale enough length to find the ground again.

A slow, slightly longer exhale raises CO₂ just enough to steady the system.

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.

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 heat 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

Restlessness is scattered activation.

Energy without direction.

Attention moving faster than the breath can follow.

You don't slow down by force.

You 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.

OVERTHINKING

Shape: Exhale-extended (gentle)

Overthinking is restlessness that climbed upward.
The breath stays high; the chest becomes the mind's
echo chamber.

You invite the system back down by softening the
exhale.

Not long enough to feel heavy — just long enough to
widen the space under the diaphragm.

As CO₂ rises a little, cognitive speed drops.
Thoughts lose their sharp edge.
The body makes room again for perspective.

SADNESS

Shape: Even (slow)

Sadness folds the chest inward.

The breath becomes narrow, as if protecting something soft.

You don't lift it or calm it.

You give it 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 — 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 enough to activate sharply — just enough to
return a bit of structure to the muscles and clarity to
the mind.

As the inhale widens, tone returns.

You wake without forcing yourself awake.

FOCUS

Shape: Inhale-extended (sharper)

Focus is not effort.

It is direction.

You enter it by making the inhale slightly longer and slightly cleaner than usual.

The body lifts just enough to narrow attention, but not enough to create pressure.

As the inhale sets the line, distractions fall away.

The system becomes precise without becoming tense.

PAIN

Shape: Inhale-extended (broad, soft)

Pain is contraction.

The body closes around the signal, tightening everything nearby.

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.

As the inhale expands the tissues, the guarding reflex eases.

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, so the sympathetic charge has somewhere to go.

At the end of the exhale, 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.
The system comes back to its own space.

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.

Not sharply — 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 not a switch — it is a slope.

A long, unbroken exhale followed by a soft pause
lowers the whole system in a way nothing else does.

You don't try to feel sleepy.

You 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 not energy.

It is tone.

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.

You start with a few even breaths to stabilise the system.

Then one or two 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.

SOCIAL ENTRY

Shape: Even > Ascent (ultra-short pause)

Before stepping into a room or a conversation, the body often anticipates more than it needs. You don't calm it; you align it.

Even breath reduces the subtle contractions around the chest and throat.

A micro-ascent — a rise with almost no pause — creates availability without performance.

You enter the space as yourself, not as your preparation.

APPROACH TENSION

Shape: Even > Ascent (very short pause)

When something must be said and the body pulls both forward and backward at once, breath becomes the first place of clarity.

Even breath reduces the inward recoil.

A short-pause ascent gives just enough tone to step into the moment.

You don't push.

You don't brace.

You simply stop collapsing inside yourself, and the words can come.

BOUNDARY SETTING

Shape: Even > Inhale-extended

A boundary is not resistance.

It is position.

Even breath stabilises your inner line.

A gentle inhale-extended lifts the system without leaning forward, creating clarity without confrontation.

You hold the line quietly.

The body stays open.

You remain firm without becoming hard.

AFTER WORK TRANSITION

Shape: Exhale-extended (slow)

Work narrows the system.

The breath becomes focused but thin.

A slow, long exhale widens the internal space again.

Nothing to undo — only to release.

As the breath expands downward, the system returns to its natural scale.

AFTER SCREENS

Shape: Even (slow) > Exhale-extended

Screens pull the breath upward and inward.
You reverse this in two steps: symmetry first, grounding second.

Even breath resets the rhythm.
A longer exhale brings the body back down from the eyes to the diaphragm.

The system returns to depth.

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 its square, thought opens again.

New directions appear in the space created by rhythm.

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 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.

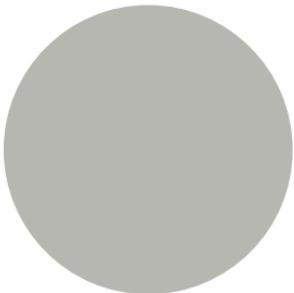
Also there is no need to bother oneself with correct positioning of the body. When you stay with your breath your body will find the best position on its own.

Think of it as a game.

Don't aim for an achievement.

Ease off and be with your breath.

That's the whole point.



This booklet grew out of years of small experiments, but the real beginning was my work on Fuck The Fear. The deeper I went into the lessons and observations behind that book, the more the breath kept returning as the quiet axis around which everything moves. This booklet is, in a way, the missing point: the part that reveals itself only through practice.

*The breath is free, because the breath is free.
Working with fear is different; it always asks something of you. If you want to explore that path as well, you can find the book at:
<https://fuckthefear.net>*

