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OREGON ATTORNEY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Welcome, Law Students

# ***IN SIGHT*** for Oregon Lawyers

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

## **TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE THROUGH BREATHING**

Your breath is an amazingly powerful tool. It will help you in a variety of ways, providing you with energy, calm, and stability when you need them. This article will help you become more aware of your breath and help you to develop good breathing habits.

### **Breathing Exercise #1 – The Hunchback**

Let your posture go. Release your spine and let it curve forward. Let your shoulders drop and your chin come forward as if you've been hunched over your desk or computer for a few hours. Notice how you are breathing. Are you taking full, deep breaths? Probably not. You are most likely taking short, shallow breaths into the top of your lungs. Why? Because it's easy. Now straighten yourself up. Pull back your shoulders, and lift up your head. Take a deep, slow, full breath. Notice the difference in how it feels to breathe in each posture.

Practicing this exercise will help you feel the difference between good and bad breathing habits. Recognizing how each of these postures feels will help you quickly notice when you fall back to bad breathing habits, and enable you to change to a deeper, more open posture.

### **Breathing Exercise #2 – Foundation Breathing**

This exercise helps you to reacquaint your body with full, natural breathing. This simple technique, practiced regularly, will slowly become your norm, changing only in response to stress, tension, and emotions.

Foundation breathing tips:

- Inhale through your nose to filter, condition, and moisturize your breath before it reaches your lungs. Exhale through your mouth.

- Fill your lungs from bottom to top, like you are filling a pitcher of water. When you exhale, gently push the air out in the same order, from bottom to top. If you experience any discomfort or dizziness, stop and wait a few minutes before continuing. Don't strain or put forth much effort.

1. Sit comfortably with your back straight, eyes closed, and hands in your lap.

2. Begin with an exhale, then inhale deeply, hold it for a second or two, and exhale first with a short burst (like you are blowing out a candle), and then with a long slow finish as you completely relax your mind and body and empty your lungs. Repeat three times or as needed to calm your mind and relax your body.

3. Inhale deeply, all the way to the bottom of your spine, progressively filling your lungs – first the bottom, then the middle, and finally the top.

4. Hold for a moment.

5. Exhale slowly, gently emptying your lungs from the bottom, middle, and top, squeezing out all of the air.

6. Hold for a moment and then repeat steps 3 through 6 for five minutes.

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### Breathing Exercise #3 – Six-Second Breath

Normally, we breathe 15 to 20 times per minute – faster or slower as dictated by stress and emotions such as anger, grief, and frustration. However, 10 breaths per minute is most beneficial to our health. Try to aim for a six-second breath cycle (10 breaths per minute) as follows:

- Inhale for two seconds.
- Hold for one second.
- Exhale for two seconds.
- Hold for one second.
- Repeat.

Once this habit has taken hold and you have experienced the power of breath awareness, you will begin to notice the changes in your breath that accompany stress, distress, tension, anxiety, tough emotions, and intense pressure or concentration. That usually signals that it is time to take control of your breath and thus your mind and body. In times of intense and overwhelming emotions, focusing on the actual count can help to momentarily draw your mind away from the issue at hand long enough for you to regain some objectivity and let your emotions cool.

### Practice Regularly

Spend a few minutes each day practicing slow, deep breathing to remind your body that this is the natural pattern. Practice foundation breathing five minutes every day. Find a time that you can commit to and make it part of your routine.

Our breathing becomes shallow or stops completely when we need it most. Noticing changes in your breathing can be a powerful tool for eliminating stress, dealing with difficult emotions, and improving performance.

Remind yourself as many times a day as you can to:

- Stop.
- Notice your breathing.
- Take two or three slow, deep breaths.

This simple exercise takes less than 20 seconds and trains your mind to unconsciously monitor your

breathing and grab your attention when changes occur. Put a reminder in your phone, calendar program, or PDA. Put a note on your refrigerator, bathroom mirror, or bulletin board. Hang something from your rear-view mirror or put a Post-it note on your dashboard. It won't take long before noticing your breathing becomes an ingrained habit and you no longer need your reminders.

Once you have established the habit of slow, deep breathing, and your body remembers that this is the natural way to breathe, it will slowly become a part of everything that you do.

### Don't Give Up!

Conscious breathing techniques have immediate benefits, but they won't completely transform you overnight. The changes come slowly, but surely. Try to be consistent, but if you miss a period of time, come back to it, keep at it, and it will become more and more natural and beneficial. Don't become discouraged if you are not attending to it as you had hoped or planned. If you keep after it with persistence, the changes will come.

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