

## STEP ONE: RELEASE THE TENSION

According to the Arthritis Foundation, having a chronic disease like osteoarthritis can be stressful. Stress, in turn, can make dealing with a disease like osteoarthritis more difficult – and painful.

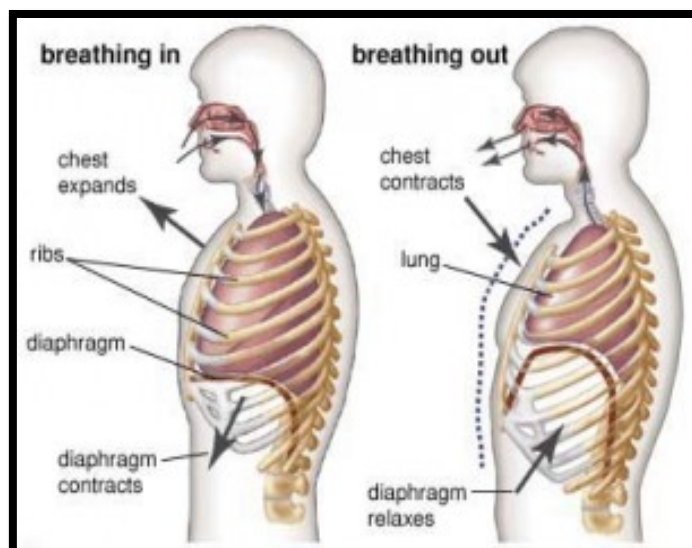
That's because when you feel stressed, your body becomes tense. This muscle tension can increase pain, making you feel frustrated because the added pain may limit your abilities. This, in turn, can make you feel depressed. Stress, depression and limited and lost abilities can all contribute to pain, which then may perpetuate the cycle. If you understand how your body reacts physically and emotionally to stress and learn how to manage stress, you can break the destructive cycle.

Prior to stretching, learning to connect with your body through mindful breathing and relaxation exercises will help to diminish this perpetual cycle by decreasing both tension and anxiety.

## TO BEGIN

Schedule a time during the day when external distractions can be eliminated for a minimum of 10 - 15 minutes.

Next, find a quiet and comfortable place to begin the breathing exercises. Either while sitting on a chair, or on cushions or lying down on a yoga mat or soft surface.



## MINDFUL RELAXATION EXERCISES

### SIMPLE YOGA BREATHING

Yoga breathing is relaxing and meditative. Try practicing this beginner technique so you can apply it while holding stretches.

1. Sit or lie down comfortably, resting your hands below your navel.
2. Tune in to the way you breathe. Inhale and exhale naturally through your nose for a few minutes, noticing the slight rise and fall of your hand. Consider the way the air feels as it enters and exits your nostrils.
3. Start to count silently forward (one, two, three...), then backward (...three, two, one), as you breathe in and out.
4. Gradually make each exhalation twice as long as each inhalation. Focus on breathing slowly and smoothly, humming each time you exhale. The slight vibration is very soothing.



### 4-4-8 BREATHING TECHNIQUE

The 4-4-8 breathing technique is a basic **breathing technique** designed to help you relax and focus. This technique is great if you feel stressed or tense. Using this technique can help you get rid of the tension so you can focus on what you need and want to do. No matter what your goal is, deep breathing can help you focus, clarify your thinking, and feel less stressed as you move forward.

**This breathing technique has four easy steps:**

1. Breathe in through your nose for a count of 4, taking the breath into your stomach.
2. Hold your breath for a count of 4.
3. Release your breath through your mouth with a whooshing sound for a count of 8. Think of emptying a glass of water.

4. Without a break, breathe in again for a count of 4, repeating the entire technique three to four times in a row, then resume normal breathing and activity.
5. Focus on counting when breathing in, holding the breath, and breathing out.

You may find yourself feeling mildly light-headed after doing this. That's actually a sign it is working, and it will quickly pass. Feel free to do this as often as you want, but you may need to get used to it first.

If you use a second hand on a watch to count your breaths, the whole exercise will take just 57 seconds! But it doesn't really matter if each count lasts an actual second; it only matters that you *count evenly* so the ratio of 4-4-8 is maintained.



### **PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXTION – SHORT HAND VERSION**

In this exercise, whole muscle groups are simultaneously tensed and then relaxed. Repeat each exercise at least once, tensing each muscle group from five to seven seconds and then relaxing from fifteen to thirty seconds. Remember to notice the contrast between the sensations of tension and relaxation.

1. Curl both fists, tightening biceps and forearms. Hold. Relax.
2. Roll your head around on your neck clockwise in a complete circle, then reverse. Hold. Relax.
3. Wrinkle up the muscles of your face like a walnut: forehead wrinkled, eyes squinted, mouth opened, and shoulders hunched. Hold. Relax.
4. Arch your shoulders back as you take a deep breath into your chest. Hold. Relax. Take a deep breath, pushing out your stomach. Hold. Relax.
5. Straighten your legs and point your toes back toward your face, tightening your shins. Hold. Relax.
6. Straighten your legs and curl your toes, simultaneously tightening your calves, thighs, and buttocks. Relax.