



Module 3 - What is Breathwork?

Defining Breathwork

Breathwork is the use of *Breath Awareness* and *Breath Practice* in order to benefit the mind, body and spirit

There is no right or wrong way to breathe. Rather, the Breath offers an opportunity for exploration. For self-realization, expansion, and even self-healing.

Notice the focus on 'self' here. Breathwork is an incredibly personal practice, and while there are many techniques and suggestions that will be offered in this Training, your greatest learning will come from *Self*.

Breath carries with it the vital energy of life. It is the first thing we do when we are born, and is our constant companion through this life.

Learning how to consciously tune into the Breath is essential to presence. And yet, this is only the beginning. The Breath also offers sacred power. The ability to immediately and powerfully alter our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual experience.



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The 2 Pillars of Breathwork

When practicing and guiding Breathwork, 2 Pillars are the foundational elements to practice. And just like the pillars in a building, there must be balance between them.

Did you know that the Breath is the only physiological function that is under both unconscious and conscious control? We will dive deeper into the Anatomy and Physiology of the Breath, but for now, know that it offers a very unique opportunity for Awareness and Practice.

1 - Breath Awareness

Awareness is about paying attention, on purpose. When practicing Breath Awareness, we pay attention to the Breath, without the need to change or direct it in any way.

In Breathwork, this pillar is essential to both the state of Presence and also a deepening sense of Self-Realization. To watch the Breath is to witness the movement of life. As we open to what the Breath has to share with us, many gifts are revealed.

2 - Breath Practice

Remembering that the Breath is under our conscious control also, we have the opportunity to influence the Breath. This is where the *doing* aspect of Breathwork comes in.

In Breath Practice, we alter the depth, the focus and the speed of our Breath in order to engage directly with the mind, body and spirit. Another way to expand this understanding is to recognize the impact of Breathwork on the 5 layers of consciousness (physical, energetic, mental, creative, and unity/spirit).



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Benefits of Breathwork

Breathwork offers a wide range of benefits. Many studies have demonstrated the power of specific Breath practices. And yet, to fully appreciate the fullness of the Breath, we must experience it directly.

Breath practices have been shared in many spiritual traditions for thousands of years. Breathwork was simply a natural part of the health and devotional practices that are foundational to the many systems of belief.

Similar to Meditation, Breathwork is used to settle the fluctuations of the mind, to deal with stress (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually), build energy, and to engage fully with the present moment.

While Breathwork is simple, it is important that we do not underestimate its power. There are very few things we can affect that have the power to completely shift our experience on all levels of being.

Let's explore the many potential benefits of Breathwork:

*Sources provided after the list of benefits

Physical

- Decrease in effects of stress
- Coherence in the heart and brain rhythms
- Down-regulates the sympathetic nervous system
- Improves breathing and heart rates
- Increases overall circulation and reduces blood pressure
- Increases longevity
- Boosts immune health
- Lessens the experience of pain and facilitates physical healing
- Lessens inflammatory disorders including arthritis



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Mental

- Increases focus and mental strength
- Memory retention and recall is increased
- Builds creative thinking and cognition
- Better able to make decisions and solve problems
- Helps manage ADHD

Emotional

- Decreases worry, anxiety and impulsivity
- Helps to engage directly with the emotional experience and process stored emotion
- Reduces stress, fear, loneliness and depression
- Enhances self-esteem, self-love and self-acceptance
- Builds resilience
- Increases feelings of optimism and relaxation
- Improves mood and emotional intelligence
- Helps develop positive relationship and social connections

Energetic

- Encourages the movement and flow of Vital Energy/Qi
- Reduces stagnation and encourages energetic balance

Spiritual

- Sense of increased connection with God/spirit/divine
- Direct experience of energetic/spiritual Self
- Opens channels to guidance and clear vision



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Divine

- Devotional offering
- Opening as conduit of Divine energy
- Recognition of Self as Divine

Your Personal Experience

- What else can you add here?

Sources

The Effect of Diaphragmatic Breathing on Attention, Negative Affect and Stress in Healthy Adults - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5455070/>

The Healing Power of the Breath: Simple Techniques to Reduce Stress and Anxiety, Enhance Concentration, and Balance Your Emotions by Richard P. Brown, MD and Patricia Gerbard MD

Just Breathe: Mastering Breathwork by Dan Brulé

What is Breathwork? - <https://www.healthline.com/health/breathwork>



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Contraindications of Breathwork

While Breathwork offers a vast array of benefits, there are many conditions that can be increased or aggravated by the practice. Now, this doesn't necessarily apply to all Breathwork practices, as there are many different approaches to practice that we can take.

The measure of safety must be left to both the individual practicing and their primary care givers when needed. As a Breathwork Facilitator, you are not qualified to diagnose or offer treatment. While we cannot provide direct recommendations for treatment, we can help to empower the individual to do their own research and to advocate for their health.

To better understand the limitations and potential contraindications of Breathwork, let's explore the primary mechanism. Breathwork greatly increases circulation within the body and the brain and may induce hyperventilation. It also tends to have a significant effect on the nervous system. For these reasons, we must consider how these effects may contraindicate Breathwork in certain circumstances.

Increased Circulation, Hyperventilation and Nervous System Effects

Prolonged hyperventilation (over-breathing) may lead to physical experiences of dizziness, tingling, heart palpitations, muscle spasms, decreased blood flow to the brain, clouded vision, ringing in the ears and possible changes in cognition. While many of these are also considered 'benefits' of the practice, we must consider when and where these effects are not appropriate or supportive for health.

Individuals with arrhythmia, high blood pressure or other cardiovascular problems, a history of aneurism or blood clots, vision problems, osteoporosis, recent injuries or surgeries, or those experiencing psychiatric symptoms, seizures or are on heavy medications must exercise caution and are recommended to first consult with a medical professional prior to beginning practice.



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The Differences Between Meditation + Breathwork

Before I get into this, let me start by sharing that Breathwork and Meditation are my jam. I love everything about the theory, the history, and most def the practices. So, when I share the differences, please know that I'm not saying one is better than the other. Far from it!

Rather, as we build our toolkit of expanding Self-Awareness, both Breathwork and Meditation offer their own unique aspects of support.

Here's what I mean...

Breathwork is great for beginners

While sitting quietly with your eyes closed and facing some of those intrusive thoughts can feel a bit overwhelming, Breathwork offers very simple techniques that can be accessed at any time.

Breathwork is great for increasing energy

The more you get into Breathwork practices, the more you will discover that you can utilize the Breath to calm or to energize. In addition to increasing energy, it can warm you right up! Great for those Canadian Winter mornings (ps. that's where I live)

Meditation includes the practice of Breathwork

Meditation is all about bringing the body and the mind into the same place at the same time. This means that to practice Meditation is actually inclusive of Breathwork. We incorporate Breathwork practices into Meditation all of the time.

Breathwork + Meditation create Unity

The ultimate expression of both Breathwork and Meditation is Unity. The coming together of energy. Recognition that we are all part of the whole.

Really, when we talk about the differences between Breathwork and Meditation, they aren't as significant as one might think. Rather, they are supportive of each other. An integral part of our path of expanding Self-Awareness.



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A Personal Practice

If you are new to Breathwork, it can be helpful to know what to expect. Here are some suggestions and common experiences to keep in mind, for both yourself and for those you will be guiding:

- Breathwork is a practice and in order to achieve optimal experience, it is helpful to practice daily. First thing in the morning is ideal, as this offers a fantastic boost of energy for your day.
- Set aside a minimum of 20 minutes per day for your practice. The actual practice will be less, but it is helpful to integrate through journalling and quiet reflection. Schedule this in your calendar now.
- You will likely experience feelings in the body that are unfamiliar to you. Tingling is common, and you may feel tightness or constriction where energy and tension are being held. Breathwork is designed to help you move and release this stuck energy, so these feelings are a signal that something wonderful is happening.
- You should never be in pain during the practice. Be gentle with yourself. If it feels like too much, ease up a little. And remember that the more that you build a habit out of this practice, the more likely it is that you will experience the many benefits of Breathwork.
- When an emotion arises, be with it. Allow the emotion to move and focus your attention on your breath. This will help the emotion to move and release more naturally.

Remember, the breath is both intelligent and healing. Your natural state is Wholeness, and the breath is designed to help you return to this truth. Be curious about your experience and approach this with a sense of playfulness.



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Considerations of Developing and Guiding a Practice

A Breathwork practice is highly personal and will very likely evolve over the course of your journey. The same goes for those you guide. While it is helpful to explore the common considerations of Breathwork practice, there is no need to remain rigid in practice.

Approaching Breathwork Practice

Relating back to your original intention set for this course and your journey with Breathwork, approaching practice is about connecting with your *why*. Breathwork is not to be another chore or burden in your life. An attitude of compassion, kindness, sincerity and curiosity will support your practice and nurture your growth.

Another important aspect of approaching Breathwork practice is acceptance. When we enter Breathwork practice with an expectation in mind, we are likely to be disappointed. Expectation also sets us up for striving, which will actually hold us back from exploring the depths of practice.

Acceptance is about allowing what arises. Offering curiosity and kindness to the experience. Without expectation, your practice will lead you to the unconditional love, wholeness and freedom that you seek.

Creating a Container for Practice

Breathwork is supported by habit – creating a regular time and space to practice.

Timing

The time that you choose will likely depend on your personal schedule and ability to be alert for practice. Morning Breathwork practices are great for energizing. Evening practices will help to calm the mind and settle the nervous system.



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Length

Maintaining a common length of practice will also help to support the experience. Beginning with less time and perhaps increasing as you desire.

A typical length of practice to begin with is 20 minutes, then moving up to 30, 45 and perhaps even an hour. There is no real need to increase the length of practice, though you may find that you naturally begin to extend your practice because of how wonderful it feels.

Similar to Meditation, I suggest a very minimum of 10 minutes as it takes about 7 minutes to calm the mind-body and shift into Parasympathetic mode and the deeper brain wave states. You absolutely can start with less time, or incorporate shorter 'mini' practices throughout the day as a means to help stabilize the nervous system and mood. All Breathwork is beneficial and small check-ins are far better than none!

Space

Dedicating a space to your daily practice is very supportive to practice. Choose a space and items that you love, that bring you peace and comfort. Your space sets the feeling tone of practice and embodies the sacred choice of Breathwork.

One of my favourite things about Breathwork is that it can be practiced anywhere and you don't need to close your eyes to do it. You can practice will out on your daily walk or even while doing the dishes.

Setting Intention

Breathwork, very much like Meditation, is an ideal practice for tapping into your core values and vision. By setting an intention for the practice, whether it be for your present practice or for the highest desire for your life, you are essentially planting the seed of potentiality deep in your being. As we commune with all aspects of Self during



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Breathwork, a purposeful intention will affect our practice by offering both insight and attraction to our heartfelt wish.

Breathwork helps us tap into the deepest layers of consciousness – our creative potential. In this space of creation, a clearly set intention is sure to be manifest. Drawing out of Breathwork after practice brings with it a clarity and trust that all is being prepared.

Posture

Breathwork benefits from a variety of different postures. Each offering its own unique benefits and applications for use. As Breathwork is a more active practice than Meditation, we can typically practice in different postures without losing focus or drifting into sleep.

Below are listed different posture options and the potential uses of each:

Seated

In seated practice, the spine is erect and the chest is open. It is important that there is comfort in the hips, perhaps seated on a cushion or with some height to help support the lower spine.

Seated is an ideal posture for creating length in the spine, space for the belly and the chest to expand in all directions and is great for aligning the energetic centres (chakras).

Standing

When standing to practice Breathwork, the feet are grounded down, there is length in the spine and, similar to seated, there is much space for the belly and the chest to expand in all directions. This is also a great posture for aligning the energetic centres (chakras). It is important to be aware of taking care to avoid any excessive dizziness.

Standing is an ideal posture for energizing the body and mind, and for practices that are either gentle or moderate in strength.



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Laying Down

When laying down to practice Breathwork, the body is resting comfortably on a supportive surface, with equal weight on both sides of the body, length in the spine and ideally support under the knees to help the lower back.

While there is not as much space for the Breath to expand in all direction while laying down, the posture is fantastic for more intensive practices that may cause dizziness or even feelings of euphoria. The inner journey possible with this posture is powerful and often used with practices such as Ecstatic Breathing, Rebirthing, or Holotropic Breathwork.

Walking/Movement

When walking or moving while practicing Breathwork, there is much flow in the practice. It is helpful to establish grounding through both intention and focusing on when the feet touch the earth. In these movement practices, the Breath has the space to move and shift the body and to respond in turn to the continual shifts in posture.

Walking or movement practices are ideal for dynamic Breathwork practices and offer a unique opportunity to entrain the body-mind to receive and respond to the flow of Breath and movement.



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Prompts for Supportive Seated Posture

Suggested props: pillow or Meditation stool, chair

- Find a comfortable seated position – either cross-legged, kneeling, with legs extended, or in a chair
- Take height under the hips with a cushion or support, so that the pelvis tips forward slightly lengthens the spine
- If there is discomfort in the back or additional support is needed, rest your back up against a wall
- Lengthen from the base of the spine all the way up to the top of the head – feel as though you are being lifted from the top of the head by an invisible string
- Tuck the chin slightly to lengthen the back of the neck
- Roll the shoulders back and down, allowing the shoulder blades to soften down the back
- Place the palms in the lap, commonly held with right hand placed in left with palm upwards and thumbs touching
- Relax your jaw and soften the facial muscles
- Soften the gaze of the eyes, looking downward and closing when ready



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Prompts for Supportive Laying Posture

Suggested props: pillow, bolster, blankets, eye pillow

- Find a comfortable laying position – with supports of pillows and a blanket nearby
- Rest your head on either a low pillow or a folded blanket. This will help alleviate any pressure felt on the back of the head during a lengthy practice
- Place a pillow or bolster under the knees to support the hips and relieve tension in the lower back
- Cover yourself with a blanket to maintain warmth
- Roll your shoulder blades open and allow them to rest down your back
- Shift in position until you find equal weight on both sides of the body
- Allow the feet to fall open
- Rest the arms on either side of your body, palms facing upward
- Tuck the chin slightly and lengthen the back of the neck
- Relax your jaw and touch your tongue behind your upper teeth
- Soften the gaze and close the eyes when ready

*An eye pillow can be used for additional support



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Prompts for Supportive Standing Posture

Suggested props: if any, perhaps a yoga mat or wall nearby

- Find a comfortable standing position – with feet hip-width apart and a wall nearby if there are concerns of dizziness
- Feel your feet grounded into the earth below
- Lengthen through the legs, from the base of the spine all the way up to the top of the head – feel as though you are being lifted from the top of the head by an invisible string
- Tuck the chin slightly to lengthen the back of the neck
- Roll the shoulders back and down, allowing the shoulder blades to soften down the back
- Relax the arms open, palms facing forward for a receptive stance
- Relax your jaw and soften the facial muscles
- Soften the gaze of the eyes, looking downward and closing if this is part of the practice



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Inquiry Questions

- What is Breathwork? How would you describe the practice in your own words?
- What are the top 3 benefits of Breathwork that you have personally experienced?
- Are there any situations or experiences in your life (current or past) where Breathwork is contraindicated? Please explain.
- Describe how you will set up your personal practice of Breathwork. What are you *committing* to?