

The Eighteenth Breathing Theme

Relaxing Your Breathing

Back to breathing again! I knew you wouldn't forget to do it. Breathe in. Breathe out. Good stuff.

I'll bet you're getting very good at it by now. There's just one thing left to learn for maximum benefit from each breath. We're going to relax those breathing muscles that work so hard for you all day long.

The exercises in *Orange Level* taught you to rebuild your breathing muscles and got you breathing more fully and deeply throughout the day.

Chances are, though, that you are still forcing your breathe a little, making your body *work* at breathing. After all, it takes effort to make something work hard for you, right?

Nope. As always with yoga, less is more. Remember, the reason yogis look relaxed is because they *are* relaxed. Why do work more than you have to?

Discovery Exercise

Take a moment now to notice how you are breathing. There's no right or wrong here, but just notice how you're going about breathing right now. Chances are, you're doing much better than the first time you did this discovery, back in Orange Level.

Now notice how much effort you feel you're putting into each breath. How much are you *making* it happen? How much are you *pushing* your muscles into it? How tight are your shoulders as your chest tries to open and close? How much does the motion of the rib cage feel like work? How much are you *willing* your chest and abdominals to move?

Learning the Eighteenth Breathing Theme

You can apply *The Sponge* to loosen up your breathing, using what I call *The Relaxed Breathing Exercise*.

Set aside specific time during your routine for this exercise. It's best if you do this near the beginning of your routine, just after the stretches to warm up your breathing.

The Relaxed Breathing Exercise

1. Do warm up exercises like Abdominal Lifts, Simple Side Bend and Butterfly Breathing.
2. Lie back or sit comfortably.
3. Start practicing *Chest Breathing 1 or 2*, *Abdominal Breathing* or *The Wave*.
4. Now add *The Sponge* to this. Here's how:
5. Imagine, as you breathe in, that you are a Sponge, drawing in warm, relaxing water through every pore of your body.
6. Feel your chest rising up on this water, as if floating up on a gently rising wave.
7. Pause after you breathe in, about 2/3 full.
8. Hold your breath for a moment. Relax your shoulders.
9. As you hold your breath, feel the water soaking into all the breathing muscles that you're using in your breathing exercise.
10. Relax your shoulders. Feel them drop back.
11. To breathe out, allowing gravity to do the work.
12. Pause before you breathe in again.

Just before you finish the exercise, do several breaths as fully as possible. See if you can keep that sense of relaxation while working your breathing muscles to their limit.

To apply this during your routine:

Once you've done your warm up stretches and your breathing exercise, hold the pose for several breaths, do the *Relaxed Breathing Exercise* and look for that feeling of the breathing muscles soaking in warmth, letting go and relaxing.