

The Ninth Breathing Theme

Breathing with Your Whole Body (The Wave)

A good breath engages all the muscles in your body, from your abdominals, up to the front and back of your chest, and all along the sides of your body. And, although your body will be fully engaged in breathing, it also feels relaxed. Breathing just 'happens' as a flow of breathing travels up and down your body.



There are many other kinds of breathing in yoga. The most popular are the forms of abdominal breathing. These take the least amount of effort. However, breathing with your whole body provides other kinds of benefits, like stress relief and it can be very energizing when used in the right way. It's also an excellent choice for athletes.

To take advantage of the *Ninth Breathing Theme*, you'll need to be very familiar with the other Orange Level exercises. You'll need to be comfortable with breathing with just your abdominals, and be able to do *Chest Breathing 1* and *Chest Breathing 2* without having your other muscles do any work. If those exercises are easy for you, if you feel your breathing muscles are working separately, and if you can do the exercises in a relaxed, easy manner, then you're ready to move on to the *Ninth Breathing Theme* – including *The Wave* breathing exercise.

The Wave

When you breathe with your whole body, it feels like a wave, flowing up and down. The breath starts with your abdominals opening up, spreads to the front and back of your chest, and ends with the sides of your chest opening to welcome in the last bits of air.

Breathing out reverses this movement. It's like a wave retreating away from the shore. Your chest collapses, inward and then downward. Then, as your chest is finishing its movement, your abdominals push out a little more air.

It flows like this

Abdominals – front of chest – sides of chest.
Sides of chest – front of chest – abdominals.

When perfected, each movement flows into the other. The abdominals open up and then, part way through that movement, your chest starts to

open, and then, once your chest is partially open, the sides of your chest will start to open up.

Similarly, as you breathe out, the sides of your chest let go first. The front and back of your chest soon follow. Before they're finished, your abdominals will begin sinking down.

Each of us has their own rhythm for this. However, you will not be able to use your whole body well unless you can first use any part completely independently of the others. That is why you've spent so much time practicing one muscle group at a time.

When you get a good rhythm going, The Wave breathing flows naturally. But at first it can feel halting. You'll find yourself moving first one part, then pausing, then moving to the next part of your body. That's OK. That's how your body will wake up, realizing it has to learn its rhythm.

Learning The Wave

Set aside a special part of your yoga routine to practice this. It's best done at the beginning (to get your breathing off to a good start) or at the end, when you're settling down for meditation.

Start

Lying on your back on a firm surface, or standing upright, (in Mountain Pose) or sitting in a chair. No matter what position you start in, see that your neck, spine & legs are lined up with each other.

Have your chin pointing forward. Take a minute to see that you have good air flow.



It can help to have one hand over your belly, as in abdominal breathing, and one hand under your collar bones, as you did during *Chest Breathing 1*.

Take a Moment

To just notice your breathing. Let your breath come and go however it wants to. Feel your body settling into place.

Part 1 – Learning the Movements

Begin a breath by pushing your belly up. Breathe toward the hand you have on your belly. Taking a breath that is about 2/3 full is fine. (We're not going for gobs of air here. We're just taking a decent breath.)
Pause. Keeping your belly open.

Now open up the front of your chest. Breathe toward the hand on your chest, just as you did in Chest Breathing 1.
Pause, keeping your belly and your chest open.

Now, finish your breath by opening up the sides of your chest.
Again, about 2/3 full is fine.

Pause

To Breathe Out – reverse your movements.

Let the sides of your chest collapse a little.
Then let the front of your chest fall part way.
Then squeeze a little with your belly.

No need to squeeze out the last drops. We're just trying to wake up these muscles so that they'll work together.

Take a break.

Take a few breaths however you like and try this again.

Then, after a few minutes, try doing the exercise continuously, one breath after another.

Keep including this version of The Wave exercise in your yoga program until you can move each muscle group in turn with ease. The muscles need to feel completely comfortable with moving separately before they can work together in proper rhythm.

It can be tempting to jump into trying to make these movements flow. It might feel easier to allow the flow to happen right away. However, that temptation is usually coming from their inability to act independently. In the end, practicing the Wave moving one muscle group at a time will give you fuller, more controlled breathing.

Learning The Wave - Part 2

Once the movements of *The Wave* come naturally to you, you can try to make them flow into one another.

In Part One, you moved one muscle group, then you stopped its movement before you started using the next muscles. Now you're going to have the movements blend together.

Start – as you did with The Wave – Part 1

Lying on your back on a firm surface, or standing upright, (in Mountain Pose) or sitting in a chair. No matter what position you start in, see that your neck, spine & legs are lined up with each other.

Have your chin pointing forward.
Take a minute to see that you have good air flow.

It can help to have one hand over your belly and your chest, as in Part One.



Take a Moment

To just notice your breathing. Let your breath come and go however it wants to. Feel your body settling into place. Then:

Begin a breath by pushing your belly up. Breathe toward the hand you have on your belly. Make your breath about 2/3 full.

Part way through that movement, start opening the front of your chest. Your belly is still opening up when your chest starts opening.

As your chest is finishing opening up, allow the sides of your chest to open. Again, about 2/3 full is fine.

Pause
Relax your shoulders. (Let them drop.)

To Breathe Out – reverse your movements.

Let the sides of your chest collapse a little. Then let the front of your chest fall part way. Then squeeze a little with your belly.

No need to squeeze out the last drops. We're just trying to get these muscles to work together.

Then, after a few minutes, try doing the exercise continuously, one breath after another.

Bumping It Up a Notch

Once you are very comfortable with doing *The Wave* (part 2), add the following extra bit to the end of your exercise. It will help develop additional strength in all your breathing muscles:

For your last 3 – 6 breaths

Breathe in very deeply.

Get in so much air that the sides of your chest are ready to burst.

Your lungs are absolutely full.

When you feel completely full, even try sneaking in more and more air in little gasps.

Pause.

Hold the breath.

Relax your shoulders by allowing them to drop.

Let the breath go

Slowly and evenly.

(Breathe out like you're blowing through a straw if it helps pace your breathing.)

Feel your chest collapsing,
Then squeeze out every last drop of air using your abdominals.

Pause

Do that for 3 – 6 breaths.

Then – one last very full breath in.

Let it go with a sigh.

Then feel your breathing returning to normal.

This is not normally a part of your Wave breathing. You don't add this part when you're using The Wave during your yoga poses. This additional exercise is done separately to help you develop more complete breathing.