

CYCLIC SIGHING FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

In Scripture, breath is more than just the passing of air in and out of our lungs. Breath is the life-force that God breathes into the first human in Genesis 2. In the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament, breath is equated with God's Spirit. By attending to our breath we are equipped to live into the image and likeness of God. How amazing that an activity so fundamental to our everyday experience holds the tools for our healing.

What is it? A "cyclic sigh" consists of a double inhale through the nose followed by an extended exhale through the mouth.

Why do it? This breathing practice was found in a rigorous trial to reduce anxiety symptoms, lower heart rate, and improve positive mood.



"When we teach people to control the physical effects of a stressor on their body, it puts them in a better position to deal with the stressor itself."

Dr. David Spiegel
Stanford University

How does it work? The double inhale puts gentle internal pressure on the vagus nerve, which invokes the parasympathetic nervous system. The long exhale also activates the parasympathetic nervous system which is our body's built-in system for calming our heart rate and soothing our bodies following a stressful experience.

Effects of cyclic sighing were seen after just five minutes of practice daily for 30 days.

Cyclic sighing is a practice that can be done anytime and anywhere.
There is no cost and zero side effects.

The Duke Clergy Health Initiative identifies, tests, and promotes evidence-based practices to support the wellbeing of United Methodist clergy in North Carolina.



PRACTICE CYCLIC SIGHING



You can engage in cyclic sighing when you are relaxed or stressed. The goal is to do it daily for 5 minutes. You can do it in a meditative position, while walking, or almost any time or any place. To begin, become aware of any tension you're holding in your face and soften through your brows, forehead, and jaw.

Inhale through your nose, filling your lungs most of the way full. Hold it briefly.

Next, take a second, deeper breath to fully expand your lungs.

Now, slowly exhale the breath as if breathing out of a straw until all of the air in your lungs is gone.

Repeat this process again, inhaling deeply, pausing, taking a second sip of air, and then releasing slowly out of your mouth so that your exhale is longer than your inhale.

With each inhale, imagine the Spirit of God filling you, from the bottom of your feet up through your head. As you slowly exhale, imagine God's Spirit going forth from you, through your words and actions, taking God's shalom from your grounded center out into the world.

Again: inhale deeply through your nose. Take a second deeper breath to fully expand your lungs. Release slowly through your mouth.

Continue this process until your timer goes off, focusing on lengthening your exhale to be twice as long as your inhale.

After 5 minutes, stretch your arms above your head and notice any difference in how you feel. Offer a word of thanks to the God who breathed life into you from your first breath and continues to sustain you through breath on this day and every day of your life.

Guided 5-minute practice <https://youtu.be/P2rg7c0EQoE?si=zjwzeyUR-dYWRI->

John 20:22 After His resurrection, Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit (or Breath)."

Genesis 2:7 Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.