explorations in Mindfulness

ocean breath meditation

# Ocean Breath Meditations (with Variations)

By: Danielle Palli (7 minutes)

Ocean Breathing, or Ujjayi breathing, as it is referred to in yoga, is an extremely helpful technique, regardless of whether or not you do yoga. And, it can be added to many meditations for enhanced relaxation, deeper breathing, and a calmer mind. It is also intended to improve concentration, sleep, and mental clarity. Today, I am going to walk you through an exercise to introduce Ocean Breathing as a practice and offer a visualization as an added component. Remember that this is your practice, so if any part of this meditation does not resonate with you, you are free to change it or disregard it altogether. The main purpose is to train our minds for meditation or deepen an existing practice.

Reminder: If you feel light-headed or have trouble breathing, at any time, stop this technique and allow your breathing to return to normal.

The Process:

1. Find a quiet space where you will be undisturbed for at least ten minutes. Sit comfortably, either cross-legged or with your feet on the floor. Lengthen your spine as if there is a string that runs up from the base of your spine, through the crown of your head and reaching up into the ceiling, encouraging you to sit tall. Your hands can be rested on your knees or in your lap.

2. For part one of this practice, I would like you to bring the tip of your tongue to the roof of your mouth, behind your upper teeth. Some people choose to flatten the front of their tongue against the front ridge of their mouths. This may take a little adjustment on your part until you find what feels most comfortable for you. You should still be able to breathe fully in and out through your nose. Try to breathe comfortably as I talk for a moment. Remember to keep your mouth closed and jaw relaxed.

3. Ocean Breath requires us to gently constrict the back of our throat so that the air is guided to that space in the back of the throat and into the chest and belly. If you can imagine someone snoring, or Darth Vader’s voice from Star Wars, you will get a sense of where the breath is going. Too much constriction will dry out your throat and make it difficult to breathe, but a light contraction will deepen your breath. You may hear the sound of your breath, which will sound much like the ocean, in your head. To practice this, I would like you to take a deep inhale through the nose, pulling air to the back of your throat and all the way down into your belly. Pause at the top of that breath and hold it for just a moment. Open your mouth, drop your tongue, and exhale a long and forceful sigh out of your mouth in a “hah” sound … Let’s try this one more time together … inhale through your nose … pause when you cannot inhale anymore … open your mouth and exhale a “hah.” I will pause here, while you do this a couple of more times on your own.

4. Now, let your breathing return to normal for a few moments … Next, we are going to do the exact same exercise, but on the exhale, imagine you are sighing through your nose … Inhale through the nose … pause … exhale a forced sigh through your nose. Do that just a couple of times for practice.

5. Now we are ready. Bring the tip of your tongue behind your upper teeth. Close your mouth but allow your jaw to be relaxed. Gently constrict the back of the throat slightly. Inhale slowly through the nose, pulling the air to the back of the throat. Imagine it swirling there for a moment before continuing down into your belly … Pause after you have inhaled fully … Slowly exhale through your nose. Pause at the bottom of the breath … Keep going. As you do so, see if you can lengthen the inhale slightly, still keeping the breath smooth and flowing. On the exhale, you may notice that you can slow the breath down even farther so that your exhale becomes longer than your inhale … I am going to be quiet for a minute while you practice this. If you find that your mind begins to wander, bring it back to your breath as if you are watching it on the inhale and exhale. If it is helpful for you, you may imagine your breath as a color, and watch where the color flows in and out of your body as you breathe. Another option is to imagine that you are standing in front of the ocean, and as the wave crests, you are fully inhaled, and as it descends, you are fully exhaled. In this visualization, you are matching your breath with gentle waves on the ocean. Choose which method works best for you, simply being aware of your breath, turning it into a color and watching it, or picturing ocean waves in your mind and matching your breath to it…

6. Slowly let your breathing return to normal … When you are ready, open your eyes.

Quick Version: As a “quick start” reminder about Ocean Breathing, try this…
1. Bring the tip of your tongue behind your upper teeth and gently constrict the back of your throat. Inhale through your nose, filling your lungs and belly. Pause.
2.Exhale through your nose. The air also flows to the back of your throat on the exhale. You may find that the exhale is almost twice as long as your inhale. Pause.
3.After a few minutes, allow your breathing to return to normal.