

# Breathwork

## Modified Wim Hof Method (Sympathetic/Parasympathetic Nervous System Switching):

Original Wim Hof parameters - 3 to 5 sets of 30 to 50 diaphragmatic breaths each, rapid and continuous. After each set, hold with lungs empty for as long as possible without undue straining. Then inhale once as deeply and completely as possible and hold with full lungs for 10 to 15 seconds. Exhale, and begin the next set.

Breaths should always be diaphragmatic, drawing from a place below the navel (the hara or tan t'ien). The stomach should rise first, then the chest. Fully in... and release...

Now, detailed instructions including my own adaptations with explanations:

Wim isn't fussy about mouth or nasal breathing, and usually demonstrates with mouth breathing. I HIGHLY recommend nose breathing on the inhalations and mouth breathing on the exhalations. The slight negative pressure created by drawing breath through the resistance of the nasal sinuses has a regulating effect on overall blood pressure. Exhaling through the mouth facilitates the most rapid expulsion of air possible.

Additionally, the nasal sinuses are designed to create nitric oxide (NO) during inhalation. Nitric oxide increases the oxygenation of the blood, dilates the vascular system, and facilitates a greater oxygen exchange with bodily tissues. As a result, nose breathing is markedly more efficient than mouth breathing... in terms of cellular oxygenation (the main point of breathing).

1. Lie flat on your back, no pillows or props, head should be straight back in line with the spine, face to the ceiling. (My dog Sitka always joins me for breathing exercises. She thinks it's great fun, but canine participation is optional.)
2. Relax; get comfortable; breathe normally for a few breaths. Then take 2 deep and complete breaths- in through the nose and release through the mouth, no pause between breaths. After the second expulsion, pause with empty lungs and hold until a moderate hunger for air ensues. Count the duration in seconds. (We're shooting for 25 seconds, but in the beginning it may be considerably less than that. This count will give an indication of our respiratory status for the day's session before it properly begins.)
3. The next breath begins the first set. Inhale rapidly and completely through the nose and immediately release through the mouth. During the set there is no pausing. Breathing is rapid and continuous for 30 to 50 breaths. (Start with 30 and work up to 50 if desired.) It is absolutely normal to experience numbness in the face and extremities, tingling, heat and/or cold and clamminess. In the beginning, the sympathetic response (stress) invoked during rapid breathing can be quite uncomfortable; it diminishes after a few weeks of daily practice.
4. After the final exhalation of the set, pause and hold with empty lungs. Relax. Scan the body, especially the face, and release any and all tension. Lie still; commune with the Numinous God. Refrain from breathing as long as possible. This is the parasympathetic phase of the procedure; we are seeking perfect stillness and complete relaxation. (During this long period of non-breathing the dog may become anxious and check to see if you're still alive... hopefully you are.) On the first set, typically, I will last about 45 to 55 seconds without breathing. During subsequent sets this will increase to 60 to 90 seconds. So far, I have not made it to 2 minutes (Wim's target).

5. Once the urge to breathe again becomes insistent, inhale the biggest, baddest breath of which you are capable. I tend to drive my elbows down into the mattress as I puff my chest upward, packing in as much air as I can. Now, with full lungs, hold for 10 to 15 seconds only. Again, try to relax as much as possible, knowing that some muscles have to be engaged in order to hold a full breath. I often experience slight pressure in the energy space around my heart, in my forehead (third eye), and increased blood flow to my brain stem (good for the endocrine system). After no more than 15 seconds, release through the mouth. (The dog should be relieved at this point... you're alive!)
6. This is one of my main modifications now. Instead of jumping right away into the next set, pause again with empty lungs and hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Remember to relax again, especially your face, for proper vagus nerve (parasympathetic) activation. During each relaxed pause with empty lungs, production of human growth hormone (HGH) is stimulated. That is the purpose of this added secondary pause... in the Void... with the Numinous God... making hormones...
7. Repeat all of the above steps for the remaining sets. Feel free to vary and experiment with the number of reps per set and the total number of sets according to your own body awareness and intuition. I almost never do the same configuration of sets and reps two days in a row. I often do diminishing numbers of reps over a great number of sets like starting at 50 reps, then 45, then 40, etc... all the way down to just 5 breaths per set and still achieving a long pause of a minute or more after only 5 rapid breaths in the last set. Mix it up. Experiment. Figure out what works for you. The main point is to move easily and seamlessly between freaky stress and blissful relaxation, over and over until it becomes second nature.
8. Pet the dog and go about the rest of your day.