

Breathwork Practice Study Guide (PDF)

Master the science, safety, and transformation of breathwork - combining physiology, mindfulness, and trauma-informed facilitation.

1. How does conscious breathwork influence the autonomic nervous system (ANS)?

Conscious breathwork modulates sympathetic and parasympathetic balance. Slow, diaphragmatic breathing increases vagal tone, lowering cortisol, heart rate, and blood pressure. Faster, connected breathing briefly activates the sympathetic system, often followed by parasympathetic rebound. With repetition, interoceptive awareness improves and heart rate variability rises - markers of resilience.

2. What is CO2 tolerance and why does hyperventilation feel euphoric?

CO2 tolerance is the ability to remain calm as carbon dioxide rises. Hyperventilation lowers CO2, creating respiratory alkalosis and cerebral vasoconstriction that can feel tingly or euphoric. Training builds tolerance, stabilizes drive to breathe, and improves focus and endurance.

3. Breath as a bridge in trauma-informed practice

Trauma often leaves shallow or held breathing. Gentle pacing, co-regulation, and titration help restore agency and safety while preventing overwhelm. Breath becomes a bridge between body sensations and emotional integration.

4. Three pranayamas in modern practice

Nadi Shodhana (Alternate Nostril Breathing) calms and balances. Kapalabhati (Skull-Shining Breath) energizes by sharp exhalations. Bhramari (Humming Bee Breath) extends exhale with soothing vibration. All enhance oxygen efficiency and parasympathetic recovery when used appropriately.

5. Screening and contraindications

Assess cardiovascular risks, pregnancy, epilepsy, severe psychiatric conditions, medications, and trauma history. Use informed consent and allow participants to stop at any time.

6. Emotional regulation and resilience

Box or coherent breathing increases prefrontal control and HRV, shifting responses from reactive to reflective. Daily micro-practices build composure under stress.

7. Ethics and boundaries for facilitators

Use consent-based touch, clear scope (no diagnosis unless licensed), inclusive language, documentation, and debriefing. Seek supervision and continuing education.

8. Breath awareness for performance and creativity

Nasal breathing boosts nitric oxide and cerebral flow, helping access relaxed focus and alpha-dominant states that support creativity.

9. Evidence for mental health benefits

Trials show reductions in anxiety, depression, and PTSD with structured breathing. Diaphragmatic and coherent breathing improve HRV and mood.

10. Designing a safe, effective session

Begin with grounding and intention, progress gradually, monitor for overbreathing, and close with integration (journaling, reflection, stillness).

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