



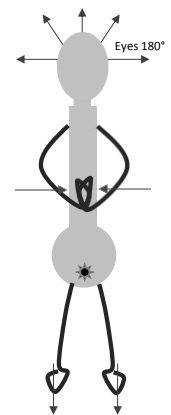
HARA BREATHING EXERCISE

LEAD THE WAY

Hara Breathing Exercise

This two-part breathing exercise helps you set your hara, center yourself, and maintain expansive energy at the same time. It's great for settling down and manifesting calm gravitas before entering a challenging situation. Start by getting a feel for setting the hara (a), then do the inhale #1/exhale #1 (c and d) a few times, then add inhale #2/exhale #2 (e and f) and alternate:

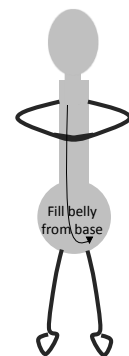
- a. **Set the hara.** Stand comfortably, feet shoulder width, weight on the balls of your feet. Let your eyes soften, using peripheral vision, and see 180 degrees around you – all at once and nothing in particular. Press your hands together for a moment and locate a place at the base of your lower abdomen that is activated as you start pressing. Keep your arms soft so you can feel what's going on lower in your body. Notice as you quit pressing, this feeling of activation in the base goes away. Notice this same activation comes back if you press your feet into the floor, and goes away when you quit pressing. Subtly activating this base is called “setting the hara.” If you think of the hara as a large sink, setting the hara is like gently closing the drain. Try this a few times, exhaling down through this center with as little pressure as you can use and still feel the *hara* set (see Figure a).
- b. **Expand the belly.** Now picture your torso in the shape of a thermometer bulb, clear and relaxed on top, with your belly free to expand at the base. Place your hands on your lower abdomen and breathe slowly in and out through your nose, letting tension drop away with every exhale until you can feel your breath move under your hands. (see Figure b) Notice if you set the hara on the exhale that the belly does not deflate or lose its sense of expansion.
- c. **Inhale #1.** Relax on the inhale and let your hands rise to your solar plexus, palms up, allowing the breath to fill the belly from the bottom (see Figure c).



a



b



c

- d. **Exhale #1.** As you begin your exhale, turn your palms to the ground and gently push them down, setting your *hara* by directing your breath straight down through the base of the *hara*, and down through the balls of your feet. Let your *hara* stay expanded. (see Figure d)

Release and relax on the inhale as your hands rise up and the in-breath comes to you. You can go back to Figure c to practice this first breathing pattern a few times and, when you're ready, go onto inhale #2/Figure e.

- e. **Inhale #2.** Relax on the inhale and let your hands rise overhead, extending upward (see Figure e).
- f. **Exhale #2.** As you begin your exhale, set your *hara* and let your arms arc slowly back to center, keeping your eyes 180 degrees and seeing both hands in your peripheral vision. Keep an expansive, big feeling throughout the exhale and in the *hara*.

Release and relax on the inhale as your hands rise up and the in-breath comes to you (Figure c). Continue alternating the two patterns for several minutes.

