How AFib Patients Can Benefit From Breathing Techniques

by BRENDA VANTA

The Benefits of Breathing Techniques for AFib Management

Besides following the treatment recommended by your cardiologist, you may want to consider using some breathing exercises and techniques for AFib.

Although you can learn some of these on your own and practice them in the comfort of your home (see below), you may also want to sign up for a yoga class. Yoga is based on healthy breathing techniques, plus it is a great way to exercise your body and relax your mind.

Breathing Techniques

Dr Andrew Weil, MD recommends the following breathing exercises. These are best done sitting in a chair in a comfortable position, with your spine straight, head inclined a bit forward and your eyes closed.

- The Bellows Breath is adapted from yoga. You have to inhale and exhale quickly through your nose while keeping your mouth closed and relaxed. Breathe in and breathe out quickly (about 3 in and out breath cycles in a second). Breathe normally after each in and out breathe cycle. Try this technique for no more than 10-15 seconds first time.
- The Relaxing Breath Exercise. Begin by placing the tip of your tongue behind your upper front teeth and keep it this way throughout the entire exercise. Exhale fully through your mouth (around your tongue). Next, close your mouth and inhale through the nose counting 1-2-3-4. Hold your breath, counting from 1-7. Exhale fully and completely through your nose, to a count of 1-8. This sequence is one breath cycle. Repeat this cycle 4 times. You should inhale quietly through your nose, while exhaling loudly (make a whoosh sound).
- Breath Counting is a technique used in Zen practice. Start the exercise by taking a few deep breaths. Next, exhale to a count of one. The next time you exhale, count 1-2, and so on, up to a count of 5. This is one breath cycle. When you start a new cycle, you will begin counting “one” on the next exhalation.

Research

A small study published in 2013 in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* found that regular yoga sessions reduced the number of atrial fibrillation episodes in participants by almost 45%. In addition, some participants of the study experienced less anxiety and depression. All the subjects were taking their regular medications as usual.

Each yoga session included *pranayamas* (specific breathing exercises which promote proper breathing), warm up exercises, various yoga postures and poses (called asanas), and relaxation exercises.

Scientists believe that the breathing control and other techniques included in yoga practice offer multiple benefits for your heart. For example, it is known that there are surges in the sympathetic tone (responsible for fight or flight

reaction) before an episode of AFib occurs. Several studies have found that yoga promotes a decrease in sympathetic tone and increase the parasympathetic activity (responsible for relaxation). Yoga was also found in studies to improve the blood pressure and emotional stress both of which are triggers for AFib, and it also decreased the inflammation and the progression of arrhythmia.