

# Breathing Guide for the Bikram Yoga Floor Series

There's a questionably funny joke in the Bikram yoga community. When there's a new person in class, after the 50 minute, cardio-intense standing series, everyone somewhat exhausted sits down on the floor, grabs water and turns around to finally lay down. Teachers often say "Congratulations New Guy, you've just completed the warm up, this is where the real yoga begins..."

The class chuckles, the New Guy looks around and thinks... *What is wrong with you people?*

It's true, the floor series is where we really work into our spines, internal organs and push ourselves mentally. But the joke isn't to dismiss the hard work and effort needed to complete the standing series. Just like the standing series (and all yoga in general), proper breathing is key to surviving and thriving during the floor series.

## Breathing tips for the Bikram Yoga floor series

### Maintain your energy with sit-ups

You know the silly two breath exhale that your fellow yogis do at the end of each sit up? It may be seem strange, but those exhales do wonders for your floor series. It's really easy to slightly exhale and schlump your body into the next pose. My experience is that really exhaling hard on every sit up will help give you the energy you need to keep going. Feeling super tired? Fake two really dramatic exhales during your sit ups and voila! You'll feel like a champ in no time.

# **Survive the spine strengthening series with 80/20 breathing**

## **What is 80/20 breathing (no really, how do you actually do it)?**

I've heard 80/20 breathing described about a zillion different ways. Some teachers have said that you breathe really quickly like a little bunny rabbit (in and out through the nose) others encourage deep slow breaths during the postures. The one key thread in all of the advice: take a deep, slow and deliberate inhale while starting the posture filling your lungs 100%. This allows for ample oxygen to flow throughout the body and also keeps your body "afloat" in some of the spine strengthening postures.

The best way I've heard 80/20 breathing described is by a Bikram senior teacher, when asked she said, "All 80/20 breathing is, is normal breathing. Take a deep breath and breath normally throughout the posture." That's simple advice I can get behind! After trying just about every suggestion for 80/20 breathing, this has been the best advice I've received.

It's hard to breathe normal during the spine series, which is why this seemingly simple advice is sometimes hard to execute.

## **Breathing in Savasana**

Your heart should be pounding between postures in the spine strengthening series (if not, work harder!). There are different philosophies on breathing in savasana, what works for me is simply just allowing my breath to flow normally.

My heart rate will be racing, but my breath is nice slow and relaxed. If your heart is racing it's natural to think that you need to also be panting, but trust yourself on this one. A relaxed unrestricted breath is the key to just letting your heart naturally slow down. Forget about your racing heart and just breath normally.

## Half Tortoise

Take a deep inhale at the beginning of half-tortoise (noticing a pattern here?) this will help keep your core engaged and light as you bend forward. Once your forehead is situated on the floor, picture the breath going all the way down your back towards your kidneys and out the tops of your fingers. Thinking of your lungs being large and expansive will help slow down your breath, maintain proper alignment in the posture (this posture should actually be hard to execute) and will expand your lung capacity.

*Food for thought: If your lung tissue was spread out, it would span the area of a tennis court. There are so many alveoli (tissues) in our lungs ready to receive oxygen, lucky us!*

## Rabbit

Your guess is as good as mine on this one. Take a deep breath and hope for the best... :)

## Spine Twist

Again, begin this posture with a deep inhale and as you twist your spine exhale all the way down into your lower abdomen. This will help compress your internal organs, deepen your spine twist and strengthen your lower abs. Maintain an even breath while holding the posture.

Each day we practice yoga is different. Each of our bodies are different. Our breath varies from posture to day to moment. By being deliberate about your breath, these techniques will become automatic and you won't need to think about them. Just like with the postures themselves, if you practice it enough, what once was awkward will soon become natural.

In those moments where it's hard to get "a hold" of your breath, just remember: You're alive, what a beautiful thing!