

# How Breath Work Helped Me Release Past Trauma

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Here's how my experience with Transformational Breath has been healing on every level — mind, body and spirit

By [Amy Paturel](#)

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I sat in a dark room, supported by pillows, breathing through an open mouth without pausing between inhales and exhales. I felt my lips, tongue and throat dry out, and then, the therapist's hands pressed into my tender spots.



"At the end of the session, I felt transformed, as I imagined I'd feel after a psychedelic trip, but without having to ingest anything more than air." | Credit: Getty

Before long, my limbs began tingling, and I felt the urge to stomp my feet while lying down. When the instructor encouraged me to give voice to the sensations, to let them go, I felt like a toddler kicking and screaming with a vibrational "aaarrrrghhhhhh."

"Transformational Breath coaxes you to integrate those feelings and ultimately transform them into positive energy."

This unique form of breathwork called Transformational Breath® aims to saturate the body with oxygen and liberate pent-up emotions that constrict our everyday breathing.

"Instead of holding your breath to disconnect from your emotions, something most of us learned as children, Transformational Breath® coaxes you to integrate those feelings and ultimately transform them into positive energy," says Mary O'Dwyer, Ph.D., founder of The Breath of New Life in Murrieta, California.

After my first session, I was convinced that this form of breathwork could help unlock the trauma inside my body since a neighbor molested me at five years old.



## | Health

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### **The Benefits of Breath**

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Dating back to ancient times, healers believed that breathing paved a path toward improved health and well-being. So it makes sense that spiritual practices such as chanting Buddhist mantras and reciting the Catholic rosary hinge on six-second breathing cycles (six seconds of vocalization followed by a six-second inhale).

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Breathwork is central to mindfulness practices like yoga, Tai chi, and Kung Fu. Many recent studies have confirmed that consciously slowing the breath helps lower blood pressure, regulate heart rate, and enhance mood.

Research also links breathwork with reduced pain and higher energy levels. And one study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association reported mindfulness practices, including focused breathing, rivaled drugs in treating anxiety disorders.

In response, breathwork has hit the cultural zeitgeist. Some methods focus on breathing through the nose with short inhales and extended exhales. Others require controlling the breath for a specific count (like box breath, where you inhale for five, hold for five, and exhale for five). Still, others call for rapid-fire breath that may leave you gasping for air.

Transformational Breath® builds on this work, combining continuous breathing with myriad techniques to maximize our potential physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Developed in the late 1970s by Judith Kravitz, DOM (doctor of metaphysics), as part of her healing journey, Transformational Breath has breath training programs in more than 50 countries around the globe.

## The Basics of Transformational Breathing®

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Admittedly, breathing through a wide-open mouth for an hour was wildly uncomfortable. I felt my lips, tongue, and throat dry out within seconds. I struggled to maintain the rhythm and occasionally paused to moisten my mouth.

"Our breath is a powerful tool for self-healing."

But at the end of the session, I felt transformed, as I imagined I'd feel after a psychedelic trip, but without having to ingest anything more than air. According to Kravitz, that transformation happens because the practice taps into parts of your psyche that are unreachable under "normal" conditions through the following methods:

- **Connected open-mouth breaths:** Breathing through a wide-open mouth creates an energy current with the continuous flow of breath through the entire respiratory cavity. (Nose breathing opens up the diaphragm but doesn't reach deep into the belly, where Kravitz says most of us store trauma). When my respiratory system was open, O'Dwyer encouraged me to feel the emotions coming up — things like grief, anger and resentment — instead of shutting them down.
- **Music:** Music of varying types is vital to every Transformational Breath® session, and the tracks are not random. They're selected to give rhythm, cadence and intensity to the breath. "Using deeper, primal music with heavy drumbeats at the beginning of the session helps create a continuous flow of breath, while the slower, more gentle tracks toward the end of the session open the door to a deeply spiritual experience," says Kravitz.
- **Toning:** Releasing a guttural, primal sound while kicking your legs and punching the air (or slapping the floor) helps clear blocked energy, especially when the physical or emotional energy is so intense that it compromises the breath. "Giving emotional energy sound and movement helps free up unexpressed feelings creating more openness in the breath," Kravitz says. I was hesitant at first, but once I started toning, I felt a release, and the sounds I created became even louder as I finally let go of feelings that had been fermenting for decades as unhealthy energy. It helped that everyone in the session was roaring right along with me.
- **Affirmations:** Before the session begins, facilitators ask participants what they hope to achieve during and in their lives. Things like: "I want more peace. I want to heal my body. I want to release stress and tension." The facilitator uses that information to develop affirmations that resonate. As O'Dwyer worked her hands into my tissues, she whispered, "It's okay to let go. I am deeply loved. It's safe in my body." Tears streamed down my face as I took a giant leap toward self-love and acceptance.

- **Body mapping:** Transformational Breath® facilitators analyze the areas in your body where your breath is constricted or shut down. Then, they press on the appropriate points using a technique similar to acupuncture. When O'Dwyer worked her hands into my lower abdomen, I felt my body letting go of the tension that lived there.

"The tender spots are unresolved traumas," O'Dwyer says. "Breathing into those areas with pressure and affirmations helps reprogram your subconscious mind."

My experience with Transformational Breath® has been healing on every level — mind, body and spirit. And while founders make no claims to cure disease, it's not uncommon for participants to experience dramatic outcomes. "Our breath is a powerful tool for self-healing," O'Dwyer says.

During every session, as the intensity of rhythmic breathing gives way to slow, gentle breaths, I feel my stress melt away. I feel lighter and more at peace. Sometimes, I scream and roar. Other times, I cry like a baby. But no matter how it goes, I leave the session feeling lighter and more accessible, but inexplicably also more inside my body.



[Amy Paturel](#), M.S., M.P.H., is an award-winning journalist who has been covering health and wellness topics for over two decades. Her work appears in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Wired, and Good Housekeeping, among others. Amy is passionate about essays and teaches personal essay writing courses online. She lives with her husband and three sons in Southern California. Follow her on Twitter [@amypaturel](#). [Read More](#)

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