

Wim Hof Breathing Method

A STEP-BY-STEP PROTOCOL GUIDE · CALM VERITAS

What Is the Wim Hof Method?

The Wim Hof Method (WHM) combines a structured breathwork protocol with cold exposure and meditation. The breathing component is the most studied element, with research published in PNAS (2014) demonstrating that practitioners can voluntarily influence the autonomic nervous system and immune response.

This guide covers the core breathing protocol, safety precautions, and how to build a sustainable daily practice.

01 The Core Breathing Protocol

1

Get Comfortable

Lie down or sit in a position where you can breathe freely.
Do not practice while driving, in water, or standing.
Set a quiet environment — use a timer for session tracking.

2

Power Breathing: 30–40 Breaths

Inhale deeply through the nose or mouth into the belly, then chest — fully expanding the lungs on each breath.
Exhale passively — let the air fall out without forcing.
Rhythm: approximately 1 breath every 2 seconds.
You may feel tingling in hands, feet, or lips. This is normal.

3

Retention (Hold After Exhale)

After the final exhale, do not inhale — hold.
Hold until you feel a strong urge to breathe.
Beginners: 1–2 minutes. Experienced: 3–5+ minutes.
Your blood oxygen remains adequate during this phase.

4

Recovery Breath

Take one deep inhale and hold for 15 seconds.
Gently squeeze the breath toward the chest and head.
Release and begin the next round.

5

Complete 3–4 Rounds

Repeat steps 2–4 for three to four complete rounds.
Total session time: 15–20 minutes.
After the final round, rest in silence for 5 minutes.

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02 Safety Precautions

- ☐ Never practice in or near water (pool, bath, ocean)
- ☐ Never practice while driving or operating machinery
- ☐ Sit or lie down — fainting is possible during retention
- ☐ Consult a physician if you have cardiovascular disease
- ☐ Not recommended during pregnancy without medical approval
- ☐ Stop if you experience chest pain or severe dizziness
- ☐ Allow 4 hours after meals before practicing

03 What the Research Shows

PNAS 2014 (Kox et al.): WHM practitioners showed voluntary control of the autonomic nervous system and reduced inflammatory markers when exposed to endotoxin (E. coli lipopolysaccharide).

Neurophysiology 2018: The hyperventilation phase induces respiratory alkalosis, raising blood pH and altering CO₂/O₂ balance. This triggers sympathetic activation, which may explain the heightened alertness and adrenaline surge practitioners report.

Psychophysiology 2019: Regular WHM practice was associated with lower perceived stress and improved heart rate variability (HRV), a marker of autonomic nervous system flexibility.

Important Distinction

The retention phase is not oxygen deprivation — the 30 breaths prior saturate hemoglobin and lower CO₂. The "urge to breathe" is triggered by CO₂ accumulation, not low oxygen. Blood O₂ remains above 95% for most of the retention in trained practitioners.

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04 4-Week Beginner Schedule

- Week 1** 3 rounds · 1–2 min retention · Morning, fasted
- Week 2** 3 rounds · 2 min retention · Add 1 min cold shower after
- Week 3** 4 rounds · 2–3 min retention · Track HRV on day of practice
- Week 4** 4 rounds · 3+ min retention · Add optional meditation (5 min)

05 Daily Practice Checklist

- ☐ Morning session (before breakfast, ideally)
- ☐ Empty stomach — no food for at least 2 hours
- ☐ Lying down or seated — not standing
- ☐ 3–4 rounds of 30–40 power breaths
- ☐ Hold after exhale until strong urge to breathe
- ☐ Recovery breath held 15 seconds per round
- ☐ 5-minute rest after final round
- ☐ Note retention time and subjective state in journal
- ☐ Cold shower (optional) immediately after final round

06 Common Questions

Why do I feel lightheaded?

Lightheadedness is caused by the drop in CO₂ during power breathing.
It is normal and passes within seconds. Sit or lie down during practice.

Can I use WHM breathing for anxiety?

The retention phase activates the parasympathetic system (rest/digest), which can reduce acute anxiety. Many practitioners use it as a rapid reset before stressful events. Box breathing may be preferable for those who find extended breath holds triggering.

How long until I notice effects?

Most people notice improved alertness and cold tolerance within 2–3 weeks of consistent daily practice.