Dirga: Three-Part Breath

Before you practice

These guides are general fitness and mindfulness content written by BLKMAT. They are not medical advice, therapy, or treatment, and they are not a substitute for a qualified yoga teacher or health professional.

- Check with a doctor or physical therapist before starting a new exercise routine, especially if you are pregnant, recovering from an injury or surgery, or managing a heart, blood-pressure, joint, or balance condition.
- Move within a comfortable range. Mild stretching sensation is fine; sharp, pinching, or electric pain, numbness, or dizziness means stop.
- If you feel faint, dizzy, short of breath, or unwell at any point, stop and rest. Get medical help if it doesn't pass quickly.
- Breathe through your nose if you can, and never hold your breath to force a pose.
- Use a wall, chair, folded blanket, or pillow for support whenever it helps. Props are not "cheating."
- Practice on a dry mat on a flat, non-slip floor. BLKMAT mats have a natural rubber base, which contains latex.

Zodiac and chakra themes in these guides are cultural and creative frameworks for choosing what to practice and what to pay attention to. They are not scientific or health claims.

A BLKMAT guide to Dirga, the three-part breath. About 5 minutes, seated or lying down. Read the safety note first.

What it is

Dirga (also called the complete breath, or three-part breath) divides one inhale into three stages: the belly expands first, then the rib cage widens, then the upper chest lifts. The exhale reverses the order — chest, ribs, belly. It is the standard way to learn how a full breath works, and the base technique underneath most of the other guides in this category.

When to use it

At the start of a practice, to settle in. Whenever the breath feels shallow or rushed. And as the warm-up before any other technique in this category.

How to practice

1. Sit tall on your mat or a cushion, or lie on your back with your knees bent. Rest one hand on your belly and one on your chest.
2. Exhale fully through your nose.
3. Inhale in three parts: first let the belly push your lower hand out; then let the ribs widen; then let the upper chest lift. It is one smooth inhale with two soft pauses, not three separate breaths.
4. Exhale in reverse: the chest softens, the ribs draw in, the belly falls last.
5. Repeat, keeping the breath quiet and unforced. If one part barely moves, that is normal — do not push it.
6. Finish with a few natural breaths before you move on.

Timing and counts

Session	Pace	Breaths
3–5 minutes	One breath every 8–12 seconds	10–20 breaths

Why people practice it

It shows you the full capacity of a breath, and where you habitually stop short. Teachers use it to build the breath awareness that Ujjayi, Viloma, and breath retention all depend on — which is why it comes first in this category.

Take care

- Practice on an empty or light stomach; a full belly makes the first part uncomfortable.
- If you feel dizzy or air-hungry, drop the structure and breathe normally.
- Never force the chest to lift. The third part is small, and it grows on its own over time.

Related glossary terms

Three-Part Breath · Diaphragm

Part of the Breathing Techniques category in the Practice Library.

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