

Deep Breathing Relaxation Technique

One of the most basic, yet effective methods of relaxing the mind and body involves deep breathing. When the body responds to stress, our breathing pattern tends to become more constricted, rapid and shallow. Learning to breathe slowly and deeply is a simple and readily accessible way that you can reverse your automatic *stress* response and activate your *relaxation* response.

The Basic Technique

Deep breathing is a simple technique that is the cornerstone of many other methods of relaxation. By inhaling deeply and allowing your lungs to take in as much oxygen as possible, you can start to relieve the tension that can stimulate and maintain a negative stress reaction. One of the best things about deep breathing is its “portability” - it can be done anywhere and at any time!

Getting Started

1. This exercise can be practiced in a variety of positions. If you are seated, you should sit back in your chair. Make sure your spine is straight (practice good posture!).
2. Place your hands lightly and comfortably on your abdomen.
3. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose, letting your stomach expand as much as possible (like a balloon).
4. By placing your hands on your stomach, you can actually feel when you are breathing properly. When you’ve breathed in as much as possible, hold your breath for a few seconds (count silently to 3) before exhaling.
5. With your hands still on your stomach, exhale slowly through your mouth, pursing your lips as if you were going to whistle. By pursing your lips, you can control how fast you exhale and keep your airways open as long as possible. As you exhale, your stomach deflates (like letting the air out of a balloon), while the large muscle under your lungs (your diaphragm) expand.
6. When your lungs feel “deflated”, begin the inhale-exhale cycle again. Try to repeat this cycle three to four times during each session.

Tips to Maximize your Relaxation Response

- Focus on the sound and feeling of breathing, as you become more and more relaxed.
- Concentrate on your abdomen moving up and down, the air moving in and out of your lungs, and the feelings of relaxation that you experience when breathing deeply.

Practice. Practice. Practice.

You can try this breathing technique whenever you feel tense. Some people find that daily practice for about 5 to 10 minutes at a time helps them master the technique and provides a welcome and beneficial interruption to stress.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Some individuals may have difficulty breathing effectively due to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). In these cases, diaphragmatic breathing can help you use your diaphragm correctly to:

- Strengthen the diaphragm
- Decrease the work of breathing by slowing your breathing rate
- Decrease oxygen demand
- Use less effort and energy to breathe

Technique

1. Lie on your back on a flat surface or in bed, with your knees bent and your head supported. You can use a pillow under your knees to support your legs. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.
2. Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out against your hand. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
3. Tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale through pursed lips. The hand on your upper chest must remain as still as possible.

When you first learn the diaphragm breathing technique, it might be easier for you to follow the instructions lying down. As you gain more practice, you can try the diaphragmatic breathing technique while sitting in a chair.