



Abdominal Breathing

Purpose

- Your breathing is directly related to the level of tension you carry in your body.
- If you breathe shallowly, in your chest, you will become more tense and more anxious. This kind of breathing stimulates the sympathetic branch of your nervous system, which is connected to the “fight, flight or freeze” response.
- If you breathe deeply, in your abdomen, you will become more relaxed. This type of breathing stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which triggers a relaxing and calming response.

Process

TO DISCOVER HOW YOU ARE BREATHING NOW:

- Put one hand on your chest and one hand on your abdomen (belly). Pay attention to how you are breathing for a few moments. Observe which hand (if any) is moving.
- If it is your top hand, you are breathing mostly in your chest — shallowly. This kind of breathing will increase body tension and stress/anxiety.
- If it is your bottom hand, then you are breathing in your abdomen. This will help you to relax and calm down.
- The idea is to learn to breathe in your abdomen more.

PRACTICING BREATHING:

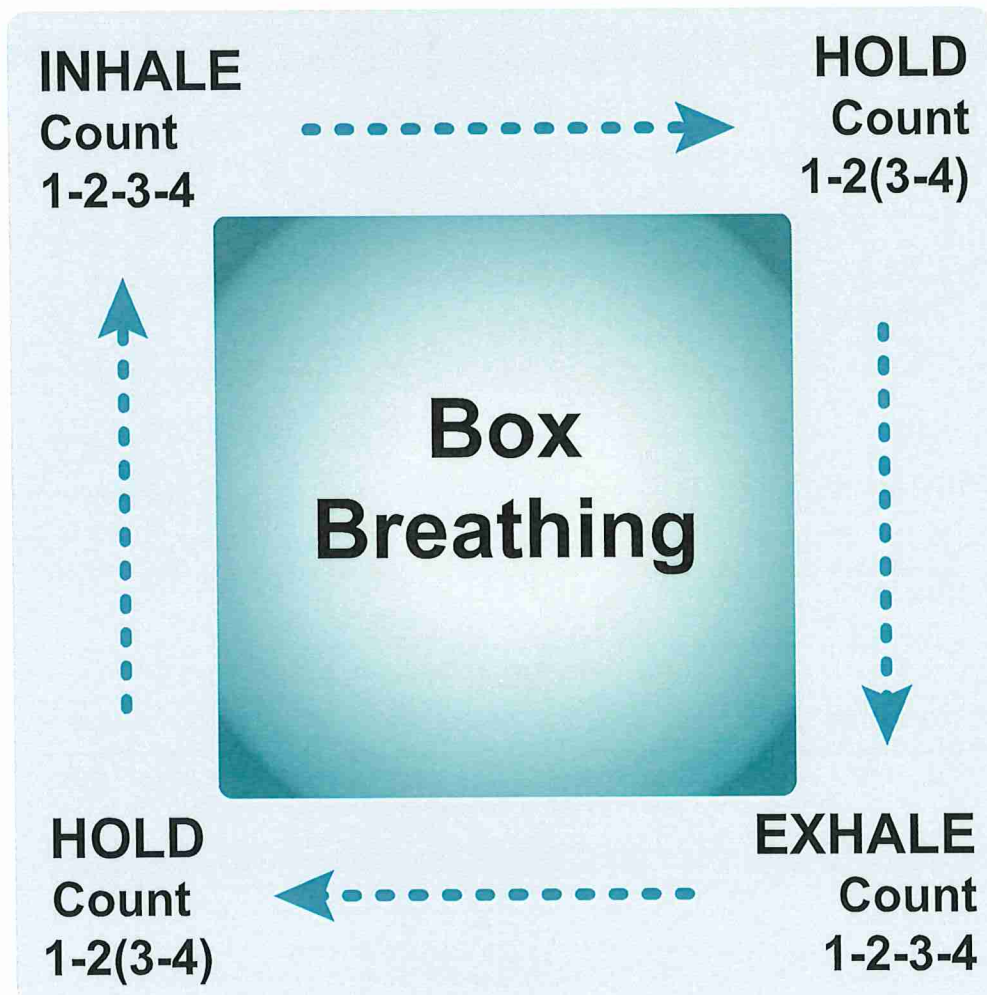
- When practicing abdominal breathing, put both hands on your abdomen and close or lower your eyes.
- First, breathe out fully. Then, as you breathe in, let your abdomen expand. You can imagine that you are gently filling up a balloon in your belly.
- Then just let go and feel the balloon emptying slowly and your abdomen flattening as you exhale.
- The more fully you breathe out, the easier it is to breathe in deeply.
- Practice breathing this way for 5 minutes twice a day.

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Variation – Box Breathing

Box Breathing incorporates brief holding of breath following inhalation and exhalation.

This is very useful during severe anxiety or panic to prevent hyperventilation.



LETTING GO OF STRESS

Self-Massage and Accupressure - soothes body/mind, relieves pain and tension

1. Head - place palms on left and right temples - press inward and forward - press 5 - 7 seconds (relieves pressure and headaches)
2. Head - place one palm between eyebrows on forehead and place the other palm to the indent at the base of the back of head - press hands together 5 - 7 seconds
3. Eyes - with forefinger and middle finger, apply firm pressure along the bone of the eye socket (under eye), start at the inner corner of the eye and move to the outer corner. Then switch to thumbs and press from the outer edge of the bone above the eyelid apply pressure along the bone from the outer edge to the inner edge. Then go back to two fingers and starting from the bridge of the nose apply pressure and hold and then press fingers along the cheekbones to the ears.
4. Back of Skull - press finger tips of both hands at the base of the neck apply pressure firmly along indent in back of skull 5 - 7 seconds and then massage to smooth out tension
5. Shoulders - cup right hand and apply firm pressure tapping along shoulder muscle up to neck. Do the same with the left hand and shoulder.
6. Hands - using thumb massage slowly and firmly point in middle of palm (anxiety, stress and tension relief)
7. Forefinger and Thumb - (Avoid if pregnant) apply pressure to joint between forefinger and thumb - 5 - 7 seconds (releases toxins especially good for head- and tooth-aches)

Staying relaxed, breathe deeply and easily

Stretching (head, neck shoulders triangle) (releases tension and increases range of motion)

Use as warm up for walking or biking, etc. Hold stretches 10 - 20 seconds without pain

1. Cross legs, rest hands on knees, Allow shoulders to fall loosely, Chin to chest allowing neck muscles to relax
2. Now drop head and slowly rotate head to one shoulder and then bring back to centre and rotate slowly to other side. Avoid head falling back.
3. Arm Stretch - Hold left hand loosely, pull out cross chest and grab elbow on other arm and hold and bring toward chest for count of 10 - relax. Other arm - hand loosely over top of elbow and hold and pull to chest to count of 10, relax
4. Shoulders - rotate shoulders backward in big circles, breathing slowly and evenly. Reverse Directions make big circles moving forward.
5. Both Hands on Knees - squeeze shoulder blades together in back, hold to count of 10. Hands forward (cross) touching press forward out in front of you to count of 10.

Deep Breathing

- Lie down on back, with one hand on abdomen, relax
- Breathe slowly, deeply through nose, allowing abdomen to expand and press against hand
- Inhale through nose to count of 5 and exhale through mouth to count of 5
- You may also Say "peace" or "relax" as you exhale

Progressive Relaxation (lying down or in a chair) (releases cravings: stress, fatigue, muscle spasms, etc.) (If you wish, place rolled towel under neck and knees)
Voluntarily tighten and release each of the muscle groups, tighten for 5 to 7 secs and relax for 10 - 20 secs. Add pillows for neck and knees. Loosen any restrictive clothing. Find comfortable position, relax and allow all muscles to relax, breathe and let go.

Allow yourself to go limp, breathe through nose and exhale through mouth. Let go.

❖ Right Leg - straighten, slowly lift off the floor - 2-3 feet, pull toes forward towards forehead, notice tension, hold and slowly lower leg to floor and completely release. Feel relaxation in leg. Notice difference between tension and relax phases. Feel the letting go.
Repeat with Left Leg

❖ Lower Back and Abdominal Area - focus on small part of back, just above the tailbone, press to floor and hold, feel the tension and release, feel and let go.

Whole body is becoming warm, relaxed and heavy. Check breathing

❖ Upper Body - muscles in upper body. Straighten both arms to sides with palms facing legs, with arms straight press palms against legs, hold tension, feel it and then relax. Feel it in the arms, shoulders, chest and back.

❖ Face - clench teeth together, furrow brows, tighten and press lips, make whole face tense and tighten, hold and relax. Feel the letting go.

Scan the whole body for muscle tension and tense that area for 5-7 seconds and then relax. Whole body is warm, heavy and relaxed. Slowly bring yourself back, like a bubble, becoming lighter and rising to the surface of the water - wake body up.

HELPFUL TIPS:

- ❖ Keep journal - write your stress out
- ❖ Take several mini breaks throughout the day
- ❖ Cover clocks and live day according to body rhythms of the day
- ❖ Ask others for help and support
- ❖ Take time-outs
- ❖ Live in the present
- ❖ Break big tasks into smaller ones
- ❖ Exercise
- ❖ Get plenty of sleep
- ❖ Eat regularly a healthy diet
- ❖ Laugh
- ❖ Prioritize what's important to you
- ❖ Use positive visualizations



Proven Stress Reducers

1. Get up fifteen minutes earlier in the morning. The inevitable morning mishaps will be less stressful.
2. Prepare for the morning the evening before. Set the breakfast table, make lunches, put out the clothes you plan to wear, etc.
3. Don't rely on your memory. Write down appointment times, when to pick up the laundry, when library books are due, etc.
4. Do nothing which, after being done, leads you to tell a lie.
5. Make duplicates of all keys. Bury a house key in a secret spot in the garden and carry a duplicate car key in your wallet, apart from your key ring.
6. Practice preventive maintenance. Your car, appliances, home, and relationships will be less likely to break down/fall apart "at the worst possible moment."
7. Be prepared to wait. A paperback can make a wait in a post office line almost pleasant.
8. Procrastination is stressful. Whatever you want to do tomorrow, do today; whatever you want to do today, do it now.
9. Plan ahead. Don't let the gas tank get below one-quarter full; keep a well-stocked "emergency shelf" of home staples; don't wait until you're down to your last bus token or postage stamp to buy more; etc.
10. Don't put up with something that doesn't work right. If your alarm clock, wallet, shoe laces, windshield wipers-whatever-are a constant aggravation, get them fixed or get new ones.
11. Allow 15 minutes of extra time to get to appointments. Plan to arrive at an airport one hour before domestic departures.
12. Eliminate (or restrict) the amount of caffeine in your diet.
13. Always set up contingency plans, "just in case." ("If, for some reason, either of us is delayed, here's what we'll do...", kind of thing. Or, "If we get split up in the shopping center, here's where we'll meet.")
14. Relax your standards. The world will not end if the grass doesn't get mowed this weekend.

15. Pollyanna-Power! For every one thing that goes wrong, there are probably 10 or 50 or 100 blessings. Count 'em!

16. Ask questions. Taking a few moments to repeat back directions, what someone expects of you, etc., can save hours. (The old "the hurrieder I go, the behinder I get," idea.)

17. Say "No!" Saying "no" to extra projects, social activities, and invitations you know you don't have the time or energy for takes practice, self-respect, and a belief that everyone, everyday, needs quiet time to relax and be alone.

18. Unplug your phone. Want to take a long bath, meditate, sleep, or read without interruption? Drum up the courage to temporarily disconnect. (The possibility of there being a terrible emergency in the next hour or so is almost nil.) Or use an answering machine.

19. Turn "needs" into preferences. Our basic physical needs translate into food, water, and keeping warm. Everything else is a preference. Don't get attached to preferences.

20. Simplify, simplify, simplify.

21. Make friends with non worriers. Nothing can get you into the habit of worrying faster than associating with chronic worrywarts.

22. Get up and stretch periodically if your job requires that you sit for extended periods.

23. Wear earplugs. If you need to find quiet at home, pop in some earplugs.

24. Get enough sleep. If necessary, use an alarm clock to remind you to go to bed.

25. Create order out of chaos. Organize your home and workspace so that you always know exactly where things are. Put things away where they belong and you won't have to go through the stress of losing things.

26. When feeling stressed, most people tend to breathe short, shallow breaths. When you breathe like this, stale air is not expelled, oxidation of the tissues is incomplete, and muscle tension frequently results. Check your breathing throughout the day, and before, during, and after high-pressure situations. If you find your stomach muscles knotted and your breathing is shallow, relax all your muscles and take several deep, slow breaths.

27. Writing your thoughts and feelings down (in a journal, or on paper to be thrown away) can help you clarify things and can give you a renewed perspective

28. Try the following yoga technique whenever you feel the need to relax. Inhale deeply through your nose to the count of eight. Then, with lips puckered, exhale very slowly through your mouth to the count of 16, or for as long as you can. Concentrate on the long sighing sound and feel the tension dissolve. Repeat 10 times.



29. Inoculate yourself against a feared event. Example: before speaking in public, take time to go over every part of the experience in your mind. Imagine what you'll wear, what the audience will look like, how you will present your talk, what the questions will be and how you will answer them, etc. Visualize the experience the way you would have it be. You'll likely find that when the time comes to make the actual presentation, it will be "old hat" and much of your anxiety will have fled.

30. When the stress of having to get a job done gets in the way of getting the job done, diversion - a voluntary change in activity and/or environment-may be just what you need.

31. Talk it out. Discussing your problems with a trusted friend can help clear your mind of confusion so you can concentrate on problem solving.

32. One of the most obvious ways to avoid unnecessary stress is to select an environment (work, home, leisure) which is in line with your personal needs and desires. If you hate desk jobs, don't accept a job which requires that you sit at a desk all day. If you hate to talk politics, don't associate with people who love to talk politics, etc.

33. Learn to live one day at a time.

34. Every day, do something you really enjoy.

35. Add an ounce of love to everything you do.

36. Take a hot bath or shower (or a cool one in summertime) to relieve tension.

37. Do something for somebody else.

38. Focus on understanding rather than on being understood; on loving rather than on being loved.

39. Do something that will improve your appearance. Looking better can help you feel better.

40. Schedule a realistic day. Avoid the tendency to schedule back-to-back appointments; allow time between appointments for a breathing spell.

41. Become more flexible. Some things are worth not doing perfectly and some issues are fine to compromise upon.

42. Eliminate destructive self-talk: "I'm too old to...," "I'm too fat to...," etc.

43. Use your weekend time for a change of pace. If your work week is slow and patterned, make sure there is action and time for spontaneity built into your weekends. If your work week is fast-paced and full of people and deadlines, seek peace and solitude during your days off. Feel as if you aren't accomplishing anything at work? Tackle a job on the weekend which you can finish to your satisfaction.



44. "Worry about the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves." That's another way of saying: take care of the today's as best you can and the yesterdays and the tomorrows will take care of themselves
45. Do one thing at a time. When you are with someone, be with that person and with no one or nothing else. When you are busy with a project, concentrate on doing that project and forget about everything else you have to do.
46. Allow yourself time-everyday-for privacy, quiet, and introspection.
47. If an especially unpleasant task faces you, do it early in the day and get it over with, then the rest of your day will be free of anxiety.
48. Learn to delegate responsibility to capable others.
49. Don't forget to take a lunch break. Try to get away from your desk or work area in body and mind, even if it's just for 15 or 20 minutes.
50. Forget about counting to 10. Count to 1,000 before doing something or saying anything that could make matters worse.
51. Have a forgiving view of events and people. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world.
52. Have an optimistic view of the world. Believe that most people are doing the best they can.
53. Pet a friendly dog or cat.
54. Stop trying to fix other people!
55. Ask a friend for a hug. Offer one to them.
56. Know your limitations and let others know them too.
57. Go outside. Plant a tree or feed the birds.
58. Talk less. Listen more.



