

BREATHE EASY

BREATHING EXERCISES



WHY IS BREATHING WELL IMPORTANT?

Obviously, breathing is essential to life. However, breathing is even more important than you might think. How deeply you breathe, how rapidly you breathe, and whether you breathe from your chest or from your abdomen profoundly affect your body and mind. Learning and using proper breathing techniques is one of the most beneficial things that you can do for both your short-term and long-term physical and emotional health. Since breathing is something that we can control, it can be a very useful tool for achieving a relaxed state of mind and body. The regularity of practice is more important than the amount of time.

HOW DOES BREATHING AFFECT HEALTH?

During times of emotional stress, our nervous system is stimulated and affects a number of physical responses. During this process our heart rate rises, our muscles tense, our digestion slows, we start to sweat, and our breathing becomes over-stimulated, leading to an imbalance of the system that can result in inflammation, high blood pressure, and muscle pain.

We can aid our nervous system in regaining balance by voluntarily slowing and deepening our breathing. By simply changing our breathing, we can directly stimulate a reversal of the physical changes caused by our nervous system during the stress response. By practicing breathing exercises on a regular basis, we can improve our heart rate, blood pressure, digestion, sleep, and the stability of our nervous system, as well as stimulate a generalized relaxation response that results in less tension and an overall sense of well-being.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF BREATHING EXERCISES?

Breathing exercises are easy, free, don't require any equipment, and can be done anywhere at any time. In general, breathing exercises are very safe. There is a risk of hyperventilation that can result in dizziness and/or loss of consciousness if breathing exercises are done too rapidly.

HOW ARE BREATHING EXERCISES DONE?

There are many different breathing exercises. Listed here is just one simple, yet very beneficial breathing techniques. To achieve the greatest benefit, breathing exercises should be practiced on a daily basis, preferably not immediately after eating or on an empty stomach.

ABDOMINAL BREATHING TECHNIQUE

Breathing exercises such as this one should be done twice a day or whenever you find yourself under stress, your mind dwelling on upsetting thoughts, or when you are experiencing pain. Abdominal breathing is just one of the many breathing exercises, but it is the most important one to learn before exploring other techniques. The more it is practiced, the more natural it will become, improving your mind and body's internal balanced rhythm.

- Place one hand on your chest and the other hand on your abdomen. When you take a deep breath in, the hand on the abdomen should rise higher than the one on the chest. This ensures that the diaphragm is pulling air into the bases of the lungs.
- Place your tongue at the ridge of tissue behind your upper teeth, keeping it there through the entire exercise.
- After completely exhaling through your mouth, take a slow deep breath in quietly through your nose for a count of 4, imagining that you are sucking in all of the air in the room.
- Hold it for a count of 7 (*or as long as you are able, not exceeding 7*)
- Slowly exhale through your mouth for a count of 8. As all the air is released with exhalation, gently contract your abdominal muscles to completely evacuate the remaining air in your lungs. It is important to remember that we deepen respiration's by completely exhaling air, rather than inhaling more of it.

Repeat the cycle four more times for a total of five deep breaths. Do not do more than 5 at one time for the first few months of practice.

TIP

- In general, exhalation should be twice as long as inhalation.
- If you have trouble with the exercise, you can speed it up but maintain the 4:7:8 ratio. With practice you will be able to slow it down and breathe in and out more deeply.
- A rate of one full breath (inhalation and exhalation) every 10 seconds (for a total of 6 breaths per minute) has been found to have the most beneficial effect on stabilizing the nervous system and reducing blood pressure.
- The use of the hands on the chest and abdomen is needed only to help you train your breathing. Once you feel comfortable with your ability to breathe into your abdomen, you no longer need to do the hands placement of the exercise.
- Once you feel comfortable with the technique, you may want to incorporate words that enhance the exercise. Examples are to say to yourself, "relaxation" (with inhalation) and "stress" or "anger" (with exhalation), so that you are breathing "in with the good and out with the bad." The idea is that you bring in the feeling/emotion that you want with inhalation and release those you do not want with exhalation.

