

Breathing

Learning to breathe well can help to reduce your stress levels; it can lower heart rate, blood pressure and take you out of an anxious fear, fight, flight state into a more calm and relaxed state.

Whenever possible breathe through your nose!

Your nose acts as a filter; it can trap dirt, viruses and bacteria and prevent them from entering the lungs. It moistens and warms the air before it gets into your lungs. When we nasal breathe we also form a gas called nitric oxide, which is fantastic for opening up our airways allowing 10-15% more oxygen into our lungs .

Take notice of your normal breathing pattern:

Get comfortable, lie down or sit for these exercises. If you are lying down have a pillow to support your head, for most people keeping your knees bent will be more comfortable. Shrug or roll your shoulders a few times to relax them before you begin.

Place one hand onto your upper chest and the other onto your tummy area, over your belly button.

Initially just notice your breathing, notice the speed of your breath, notice if your chest or your abdomen moves as you breathe in, notice how deep or shallow your breath feels. Remember how this feels and you can compare it to how you feel after the exercise below.

Breathing exercise for relaxation

When you are ready to begin, remain in the same position

Breathe in through your nose as if you are smelling a bunch of flowers.

Hold the breath for a few seconds

Breathe out through your mouth as if you are gently blowing a candle, you want to make the candle flicker but not blow it out. Long and slow, really empty your lungs.

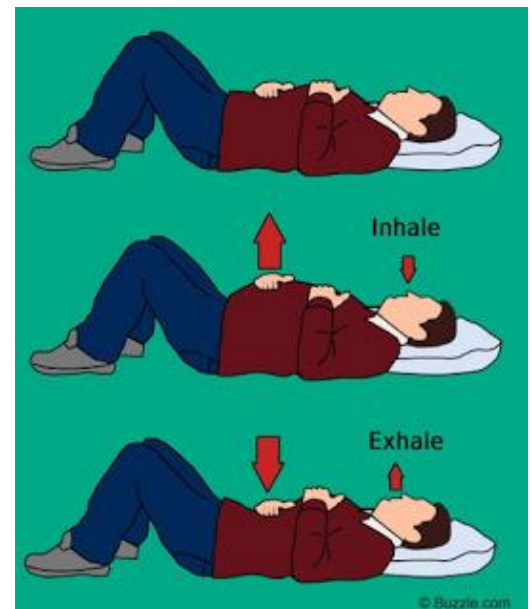
WAIT until you feel you need another breath and when you do repeat.

Repeat this pattern for a couple of minutes.

Sometimes people can feel light headed or tingly when first doing breathing exercises. If this happens, pause the exercise, breathe normally and try wiggling your fingers and toes until the sensation passes. When you try again maybe shorten your breath a little.

Is your diaphragm working well?

Ideally you will find that the hand on your tummy rises when you breathe in. This is your diaphragm, the main breathing muscle working. If you find that your chest rises more than your stomach then try and focus on allowing your chest to relax and make your stomach rise or push out against your hand as your breathe in.



Tips: If you are lying down you can put a heavy book on your stomach and see if you can work your diaphragm by moving the book up as you fill your lungs with air. If you are sitting you could wrap a scarf around your lower ribs and hold it quite tightly, as you breathe in feel your ribs pushing against the scarf.

There are many different breathing exercises, the purpose of this one is really to relax you and slow and deepen your breathing.

Once this feels comfortable and easy you can **try and make sure that your out breath is twice as long as your in breath**. So if your natural deep breath in takes 2-3 seconds then when you breathe out try and make it last for 4-6 seconds. Try and practice this each day, several times a day.

If you are prone to panic attacks or hyperventilation then try and practice this breathing little and often when you are not feeling at your most anxious.

If you find this type of breathing uncomfortable or difficult speak to your practitioner, it may be that you need a different exercise to begin with. This advice sheet describes just one of many approaches to establishing a good breathing pattern.

Don't give up. Learning to breathe well has enormous benefits for general health and well being.