

Deep Breathing

What is deep breathing?

Deep breathing involves using your diaphragm muscle to help bring about a state of physiological relaxation. The diaphragm is a large muscle that rests across the bottom of your rib cage. When you inhale, the diaphragm muscle drops, opening up space so air can come in. When watching someone do this, it looks like your stomach is filling with air. This type of breathing helps activate the part of your nervous system that controls relaxation. It can lead to decreased heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension and to an overall feeling of relaxation.

Why be concerned with how I'm breathing?

- To increase your awareness of the role that breathing plays in increased physical tension and contributes to increasing your bodies stress response
- To lower your level of stress-related arousal and tension
- To give you a method of taking calm, relaxing breaths to break the cycle of increasing arousal during stressful situations

What is the best way to use deep breathing exercises?

- Use deep breathing frequently.
- Take deep breaths at the first signs of stress, anxiety, physical tension, or symptoms.
- Schedule time for relaxation. My scheduled time for deep breathing will be: _____.

Relaxation: Diaphragmatic Breathing

1. Sit in a comfortable position.
2. Place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest.
3. Try to breathe so that only your stomach rises and falls.

As you inhale, concentrate on your chest remaining relatively still while your stomach rises. It may be helpful for you to imagine that your pants are too big and you need to push your stomach out to hold them up. When exhaling, allow your stomach to fall in and the air to fully escape.

Inhale slowly. You may choose to hold the air in for about a second. Exhale slowly. Don't push the air out, but just let the natural pressure of your body slowly move it out.

It is normal for this healthy method of breathing to feel a little awkward at first. With practice, it will feel more natural.

4. Get your mind on your side.

One other important factor in getting relaxed is your mind. Your mind and body are connected. The mind influences the body and the body influences the mind. What you do with your mind when you are trying to relax is very important. The key is to avoid thinking about stressful things.

You can think about...

Neutral things (e.g., counting, saying a word like "calm" or "relax")

Pleasant things (e.g., imagining a pleasant place)

5. It is recommended that you practice 2 times per day, 10 minutes each time.

Cue-Controlled Relaxation

Cue-controlled relaxation can be a quick and easy relaxation technique.

- There are two types of cues:
 - **External cues:** Things you hear, see, or do. Examples might include looking at your watch, hanging up the phone, going to the bathroom, checking e-mail, hearing a tone or alarm, or seeing something in your home or office.
 - **Internal cues:** Thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations. Examples might include feeling stressed, frustrated, anxious, panicky, or having thoughts about negative events.
- It is important that once you set your cue, you do the relaxed breathing every time the cue occurs so that being relaxed becomes more of an automatic habit.
- When the cue occurs, relax by doing the following:
 - Taking a slow deep breath
 - Exhaling comfortably and easily
 - Saying a word to yourself as you exhale (e.g., *relax* or *calm*)
- External cue: _____
- Internal cue: _____