

Relaxation Exercise



When you are feeling stressed and anxious, it is likely that your breathing will also become shallow, rapid and high in the chest. This only serves to aggravate your anxiety.

Deep abdominal breathing can reduce tension and negative emotions, increase oxygen supply to your brain, help to rid the body of toxins and help you to think more clearly.

Try the following abdominal breathing exercise:

Step one: Note the level of tension you're feeling. Then place one hand on your abdomen, right below your rib cage. Close your eyes.

Step two: Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose and send air to the "bottom" of your lungs. Breathe out through your nose or mouth, whichever you prefer. Just notice how you are breathing. If you are breathing from your abdomen, your hand should rise and your chest should only move slightly. This is because the diaphragm (the muscle separating the lung cavity from the abdominal cavity) will move downwards and causes the muscles surrounding the abdominal cavity to push out.

Step three: Okay, take in a full breath on the count of 4 (1 2 3 4), pause for a moment and exhale slowly through your nose or mouth (1 2 3 4) and ensure that you exhale fully. As you exhale, allow your body to just let go. You might imagine your arms and legs going loose and limp like a rag doll.

Step four: Just keep breathing like this now and try to keep your breathing smooth and regular without gulping in a big breath or letting your breath out all at once. Remember to pause briefly at the end of each inhalation.

In-2-3-4, hold-2-3-4, out-2-3-4 (5 breaths)

Visualisation of a peaceful scene as a follow up to the breathing exercise

Okay, just keep breathing and imagine with me now that it is a warm summer's day and you are lying on the sand at your favourite beach. You have spread out your towel on the soft sand and snuggled into it so that you are perfectly comfortable and relaxed. You sink your bare feet into the warm sand and feel the grains running through your toes as you wriggle them up and down.

Your eyes are closed and you can feel the sun on your face, on your arms and legs and it is gently warming you. It feels just right. As you let your body and mind relax, you hear the sound of seagulls calling to each other and the laughter of people around you in the distance. The waves of the ocean are rolling in and out and the sound of the crashing water is hypnotic. With each deep breath in and out, you draw in the fresh, salty smell of the air. A gentle breeze blows over you and gently caresses your skin and all tension leaves your body.

Now keep breathing, relax and enjoy the feeling of being stress free for as long as you need to.

Open your eyes whenever you feel ready and sit up slowly.