Breathe for Mental Energy

Breathe to restore mental energy

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 anxiety, increase stress, and cloud the mind.

Thoracic breathing (focussing on expanding the ribcage) 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 thoracic breathing exercise:

**Step one:** Note the level of tension you’re feeling. Then place both hands gently on your rib cage with tips of your middle fingers just touching. Close your eyes.

**Step two:** Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose and allow the air to fill your lungs and expand your rib cage. Just notice how you are breathing. In correct thoracic breathing your middle fingers should gently part and your hands move sideways as the incoming breath causes your rib cage to expand laterally. It can help to visualize your rib cage as a basket with 2 halves separated by rubber bands that allow the 2 halves to naturally move apart as the breath flows in. Your chest and abdomen should only move slightly. Breathe out through your nose or mouth, whichever you prefer.

**Step three:** 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 any tension to flow out with the outgoing breath. After breathing out fully, allow yourself to pause for a moment before the next in-breath.

**Step four:** Repeat for 5 breaths – try counting “In-2-3-4, hold, out-2-3-4, hold” - staying without breath for 1 count before the next inhalation.

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 and exhalation.

**Visualisation Exercise**
(read first then try it yourself for 5 minutes!)

Continue breathing naturally, close your eyes, and imagine now that it is a warm summer’s day and you are sitting on the sand at your favourite beach. You are feeling perfectly comfortable and relaxed. You sink your bare feet into the sand and feel the grains running through your toes as you wriggle them up and down.

Feel the gentle warmth of the sun on your face, on your arms and legs. 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 gently caressing your skin as all tension leaves your body.

Now, with your eyes still closed, start to re-focus on the sounds in the room around you or in the street outside. Wriggle your fingers and toes and jiggle your feet. Take 3 full breaths and gradually open your eyes. Feel yourself in balance and clearly focussed for whatever you do next.

Assistance in this area and many others can be obtained from the RMIT Student Counselling Service. The RMIT Counselling Service offers free and confidential counselling to all RMIT students. Counsellors may help you to explore your concerns, both personal and academic.

The RMIT Counselling Service can be contacted at 9925-4365 between 9am and 5pm.