



Diaphragmatic Breathing

for Reducing Anxiety, Worry, Stress & Panic

This technique can be done anywhere, any time. Whether you are tense at work or home, whether in public or private, you can breathe without being obvious.

1. Lie down flat on your back, sit up straight, or stand in a relaxed manner, feet slightly apart, knees loose. You must have a straight passage for air to flow. If you are seated, make sure you are sitting up straight and that your head is upright, not hanging forward or tilted back against a couch cushion.
2. Rest your hand on your abdomen. This will help you to notice if you are breathing deeply enough and whether your chest is tight. One way to imagine this is to think about how a balloon fills with water when you attach it to a faucet. The bottom fills and widens first and then the water expands the upper portion. This image of heaviness as you fill suggests how to imagine your breath. Form an image of your breath filling your abdomen, feeling heavy and warm. This will help your body to relax and fill your lungs completely.
3. Next, blow out all the air in your lungs until you feel empty.
4. Then begin to breathe in. Inhaling must be done evenly, as if you can fill your lungs from bottom to top in equal, even amounts. It will help you to breathe evenly if you find a pace that works to measure your breathing in and out. Count your breathing until you feel exactly full, (e.g., a slow 1,2,3,4) to help you get a measured, even breath. Chances are you will take between 3-6 counts to fill your lungs with smoothly. If you don't like counting, breathe while thinking a sentence with an even rhythm such as, "I notice I am breathing in. I notice I am breathing out."
5. Fill up evenly, no gulps or gasps, so the top is reached physically (in your image of the balloon) just in time to release the breath at the same even, measured pace.
6. Exhale evenly. Count the breath out of your body, without any sudden release, never taking less time to exhale than you took to inhale. Your body needs time to exchange the oxygen and carbon dioxide, and too much inhaling can make you dizzy.
7. Exhale longer than you inhale. If you get dizzy breathing in and out at the same pace, then exhale for two counts longer than it took you to inhale or pause for two counts at the end of the breath.
8. Practice! This breathing is for you to use to calm down and get grounded when worrying excessively or having a panic attack. Most people who panic, immediately forget their panic control measures unless they have practiced them. It is essential to *use diaphragmatic breathing the moment you sense a panic attack beginning*, so you must practice frequently, whether or not you are sensing anxiety, tension or panic at the moment. Don't tell yourself, "I'm not that tense today, so I don't need to practice." That's actually the perfect time, as your body and brain will learn quickly, and you can even reset your baseline level of tension to a lower level.

How to practice breathing

Most breathing and relaxation books suggest 10 minutes of breathing per day, but that might seem to be a monumental task. It is better to start with a manageable task and build up to the longer period of breathing, which will set the stage for deep relaxation. Here's how to practice:

For seven days, practice this breathing for 1-2 minutes at a time, up to 10 times a day.

The moments throughout the day when you need to wait for something are ideal opportunities to practice. While you wait for water to boil, the light to change, the computer to load a file, the elevator to arrive, etc., take that moment to practice diaphragmatic breathing. Set a chime or reminder on your phone, post a note, make it a habit, and should you forget - just begin again (and again). THE KEY TO SUCCESS: Practice, practice, practice.