

Abdominal Breathing

This exercise will demonstrate a style of breathing called Abdominal Breathing. Abdominal breathing is a technique that will allow you to breathe more deeply.

When you become stressed or anxious, you tend to take rapid, shallow breaths high in your chest. When this happens, you are over-breathing, exhaling more carbon dioxide and inhaling less oxygen. This can cause you to hyperventilate, making you feel dizzy and can even make you feel anxious. When you are relaxed you breathe more fully and more deeply from your diaphragm.

When we are under stress, our sympathetic nervous system, the system in the body that energizes and mobilizes us when faced with stress, is activated. When our sympathetic nervous system is activated, our muscles tense, our breathing becomes more rapid, and our heart rate increases. Under chronic stress, the sympathetic nervous system becomes over stimulated and unbalanced.

By learning abdominal breathing, you can stabilize your sympathetic nervous system and activate your parasympathetic nervous system, which is the area of the body that facilitates rest and relaxation.

Learning to breathe correctly is important because breathing is both a source of energy and a source of relaxation.

This exercise will help you learn to breathe deeply through your abdomen, rather than shallowly through your chest. This will result in feelings of relaxation because it is difficult to feel tense and breathe deeply at the same time.

Choose a comfortable position, sitting or lying down, where you will not be interrupted.

Place one hand on your abdomen and one on your chest.

Take a deep breath in through your nose, and try to fill the bottom of your lungs. Send the air as low into your abdomen as you can, hold for a few seconds, and exhale slowly, pushing out all the air.

Again....breathe in (*hold for a few seconds*).....and exhale

Pause for about 5 seconds

As you breathe in, you should notice your hand on your abdomen rising higher than your hand on your chest. This is a sign that you are breathing using your diaphragm.

Breathe in, imagine you are slowly breathing in all of the air around you (*Hold for a few seconds*) and exhale, slowly blowing out all the tension and stress. Make sure you don't hike your shoulders up. Keep them down and relaxed.

As you exhale feel your abdomen contracting as you are blowing out all the air. Keep your breathing smooth and regular, never gulping or exhaling suddenly.

Now repeat this 8 more times

Breathe in (*pause for about 5 seconds*).....and out

Wait about five seconds

Breathe in (*pause for about 5 seconds*).....and out

Wait about five seconds

Breathe in (*pause for about 5 seconds*).....and out

Wait about five seconds

Breathe in (*pause for about 5 seconds*).....and out

Wait about five seconds

Breathe in (*pause for about 5 seconds*).....and out

Wait about five seconds

Breathe in (*pause for about 5 seconds*).....and out

Wait about five seconds

Breathe in (*pause for about 5 seconds*).....and out

Wait about five seconds

Breathe in (*pause for about 5 seconds*).....and out

Now, notice how your body feels. Your muscles have loosened, your heart rate has slowed, and you are entering a state of relaxation.

You may repeat this exercise for up to five full minutes as much as twice per day. Practicing abdominal breathing on a regular basis can significantly reduce feelings of stress and anxiety or can be used during the beginning stages of panic to prevent panic attacks.