

DEEP BREATHING EXERCISES

Deep breathing is one of the easiest ways to handle stress. Many people take shallow, frequent breaths from their chests instead of deep breaths from their diaphragms. Deep breathing involves deliberately learning to slow your breathing rate and breathe from the diaphragm (a muscle in the lower abdomen). It also induces a better exchange of carbon dioxide and oxygen in the blood, which leads to a feeling of relaxation. It is the natural anecdote to the "fight or flight" response that comes with stressful situations.

In addition to deep breathing during stressful episodes, it is also useful to set aside 20 to 30 minutes a day for deep breathing exercise. After several weeks of including deep breathing as part of a daily routine, your body probably will feel relaxed almost all the time. Going through deep breathing in the morning, mid-day and at night before bed is a good schedule to follow.

Here are two easy breathing exercises that can help to alleviate stress.

Exercise 1:

Breathe in.

Close your mouth and hold your breath for a few seconds.

Exhale slowly through your mouth with your tongue placed at the top of your teeth.

Do this several times until the tension has passed.

Exercise 2:

Place one hand on your abdomen right below your navel.

Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose, starting at the bottom of your abdomen.

Count slowly to three as you inhale. You will feel your hand rise as you do this.

[Do a self-check. If you're breathing from your diaphragm, your hand will rise and you'll see your lower abdomen moving downward and outward. If you find that your chest moves noticeably when you inhale, you are still breathing from your chest. Try inhaling a few more times until you notice your lower abdomen move downward and outward without a lot of chest movement. When you have done this, move on to the next step.]

Pause for a count of two.

Exhale slowly through your nose to a count of three.

Repeat this: "Inhale for three/Hold for two/Exhale for three" cycle – eight times.