

THE DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING TECHNIQUE

INSTRUCTIONS

This technique can be done anywhere, anytime. Whether you are tense at work or home, in public or alone, you can breathe without being obvious. When you are at home practicing this technique, you may be more comfortable lying down as you do it.

1. Lie down flat on your back or stand in a relaxed manner with your feet slightly apart and your knees loose. You must have a straight passage for air to flow. If you are seated, make sure you are sitting 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 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 is something to hold in mind as you 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. If you have trouble feeling this, raise your arms and clasp your hands behind your neck. It will help you to breathe more fully.
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. Breathing evenly is easier when 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. It will probably take 3-6 counts to fill your lungs. If you do not like the idea of 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, with no gulps or gasps, so the top is reached physically (as in the 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, with no sudden release. Never take less time to exhale than you took to inhale. Your body needs time to exchange the oxygen and carbon dioxide, and inhaling too rapidly can make you dizzy.

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7. Exhale longer than you inhale. If you get dizzy breathing in and out at the same pace, exhale for 2 counts longer than it took you to inhale or pause for 2 counts at the end of the breath.
8. Practice! This kind of breathing will calm you down during 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 panic at the moment.