

Relaxed Breathing

Reducing tension and anxiety...

How can you relax your breathing? Don't we just breathe without thinking?

You can learn to change your breathing pattern, and it can be very helpful. Slow, regular breathing can calm tension and anxiety. And because you are concentrating on your breathing, you stop focusing on anxious thought and worries.

I have noticed that my breathing changes when I am stressed. It gets quicker and shallower...

This kind of quick, shallow breathing is called hyperventilation or overbreathing. It is the cause of many of the physical symptoms of anxiety, such as sweating, pounding heart, dizziness, and tingling in the hands and feet

What is chronic hyperventilation?

Chronic hyperventilation is when you get into the habit of overbreathing. People who have been stressed for a long time sometimes develop this.

Can you get out of the habit of hyperventilation?

Yes, the good news is that by practising the simple breathing exercise over the page, you can change your breathing. This should help reduce the physical symptoms of anxiety, and if you keep practising you can improve your breathing pattern even if you have been overbreathing for a long time.

Relaxed Breathing

Continued...

Relaxed breathing exercise

First test your breathing:

- Breathe out fully.
- Place your hands across your stomach, middle fingers touching, just above your belly button.
- Now breathe in fully.
- What happened? If your middle fingers didn't separate, or your shoulders moved up a lot, then your breathing pattern could be adding to your anxiety or tension.

This breathing exercise is called diaphragm breathing.

You can practise diaphragm breathing at any time – sit with your back straight, or lie on the bed. Put a pillow under your head and knees if you need them

1. Put your hands on your stomach with your middle fingers just touching.
2. Breathe in as far down as your breath will go, and try to separate your middle fingers by pushing out your stomach with your breath.
3. As you breathe out again, tighten your stomach muscles and push down gently with your hands to squeeze out as much air as possible. See if you can get your middle fingers touching again.
4. Keep your shoulders as still as you can as you breathe in and out – your diaphragm should be doing the work.
5. Try to practise for several minutes so that you get into a steady rhythm.
6. Each breath out should be a little longer than the breath in, and you should aim for a slight pause at the end of each breath in and each breath out.
7. Don't worry about doing it right or wrong – just try to breathe in a relaxed, rhythmic way.
8. You can practise relaxed breathing anywhere, at any time – the more often the better. You could try setting a reminder on your phone to tell yourself to check your breathing pattern.

If you start feeling dizzy or light-headed while you are practising relaxed breathing, STOP the exercise and let your breathing go back to normal before you try to stand up.

Talk to your guide if you think relaxation in general is a problem for you

FOR MORE LEAFLETS IN THIS SERIES GO TO www.primarycare-selfhelp.co.uk