



Breathing Exercises

Most of us do not know how to breathe effectively; babies and little children know how to do this instinctively, but for some reason, we forget as we grow. Inefficient breathing - shallow and in the chest only - can intensify any worry or stress we are experiencing. Therefore, learning to breathe deeply and effectively is the quickest way to feel calm again.

Please check in with your GP to ensure deep breathing is safe for you.

The Stress Response and its Effects on Breathing

When we are in survival mode, the thinking part of our brain goes offline. We have moved into a reactive state and act *as if* we are in danger. The amygdala becomes activated because it thinks it needs to protect us. But many of us with anxiety or stress have an *overactive* amygdala, and we need to bring ourselves into regulation and back to our calm minds. When the stress hormone cortisol is released, our body-mind feels like it needs to protect us by wanting to escape a situation (flee); getting into an argument or snapping at people (fight); saying yes when we mean no and people-pleasing, which usually leads to being busy and unable to rest (fawn response); becoming overwhelmed and needing to lie down or sleep (flop); or becoming emotionally shut down (freeze). Breathing is a beautiful way to allow us to become more tranquil in the present moment. Breathing well can redirect us from worry or fear so we can be calm again. Once regulated, we can laugh and smile again, feel more sociable, and have clarity in our thoughts.



Using breathing exercises can support your heart rate to slow down, your breath to soften, your muscles to relax, and your mind to become clearer.

We move out of the dysregulated *fight, flight, freeze, or flop state* and into a regulated *rest and digest state*: we can process food efficiently, think more effectively, fight illnesses, and have lower levels of anxiety and depression*.

You can begin and end your day with breathing exercises as part of your daily routine. Using them when you feel okay will help you be prepared to use them in moments of difficulty.

*For further reading, see Catherine M. Pittman's *Rewire Your Anxious Brain* (New Harbinger Books)



Square Breathing

Breathe in for 4 seconds.

Hold for 4 seconds.

Breathe out for 4 seconds.

Hold for 4 seconds.

Repeat x 3.



Pursed Lip Breathing

Breathe in for 2 counts.

Purse your lips as if you are about to whistle.

Breathe out slowly for 4 counts.

Repeat x 3.



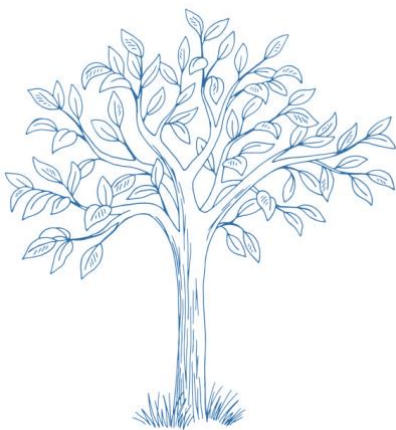
Diaphragmatic Breathing

Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.

As you inhale, notice your stomach pressing into your hand.

Try to keep the hand over your chest as still as possible.

Exhale through your mouth. Repeat x 3.



Tree Breathing

Keep your back upright, and with your knees soft, imagine you are a tree standing tall.

Touch your hands together with palms facing, in front of your chest.

As you breathe in, raise your hands above your head.

As you breathe out, allow your hands to gently lower to the sides of your body. Repeat x 3.