

TAKE A BREATH!

STOPPING TO TAKE A MUCH NEEDED BREATH IN THOSE TENSE SITUATIONS THAT LIFE THROWS OUR WAY DAILY CAN BE THE ONE MOST BENEFICIAL THING YOU CAN DO TO MANAGE YOUR STRESS. YOU CAN PERFORM THESE SIMPLE BREATHING EXERCISES ALMOST ANY WHERE ANY TIME. BE KIND TO YOURSELF. RELAX WHEN YOU NEED WITH SOME OF THE FOLLOWING EXERCISES.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

This type of breathing is the body's most efficient way to take in oxygen for nourishment and uses about half as much energy as chest breathing. The diaphragm, one of the body's strongest muscles, located just below the rib cage, moves downward, creating a natural pressure vacuum that draws air into the lower portion of the lung. During this part of the cycle the abdomen expands. Then the diaphragm moves upward and the chest expands as the breath exits, filling the upper lung with air on its way out. Imagine there is a balloon in your abdomen that stretches and fills with air on inhalation and shrinks on exhalation. This is a simple awareness exercise and is also very useful for relaxation and rejuvenation. To posture yourself for this exercise, you may sit or stand with your head up, chin relaxed, shoulders wide, slightly back and downward. Position your back comfortably straight. Pretending there is a string treaded through your spine and coming out the top of your head like a puppet, gently tugging may help. Place your hands gently on your abdomen and slowly inhale through your nose. Feel your lower ribs move outward and your abdomen expand as you breath in. Then as you exhale through your mouth, feel your abdomen drop and a wave of relaxation flood your abdomen, chest, shoulders, neck, jaw and face. Do this often during the day every day. Choose to do it at certain moments that will nourish you and energize you. The more frequently you "belly breathe", the sooner it will become a normal pattern of breathing and you won't need to use your hands to feel and direct the movement. When you notice your breathing becoming higher in the chest, go back to using your hands on your abdomen for direction.

Calm Breathing

This breathing is used for any situation that requires de-tensing, such as anxiety, anger, fear, or any upsetting emotional state that is unpleasant to you and causes your body physiology to change. Use it at the first signs of muscle tension, rapid breathing, sweating, cold hands, dry mouth, rapid pulse or tunnel vision. It will enhance the blood flow to the brain and calm your physiology to prevent an adrenaline response commonly referred to as the flight or fight response. Start by loosening your tongue, jaw, face, neck and shoulder muscles. Position yourself comfortably straight with your shoulders back and smile. Feel your breath come in smoothly, comfortably, fully, slowly and evenly. Imagine tension melting away as each breath is taken. Let each breath flow to any spots that may be tight, loosening them, creating a lightness in each muscle fiber and layer of skin. Use what ever images relax and calm you. It may be light or cool air or warm breezes or ocean waves or rustling leaves. Think of totally relaxing images and notice the color and shapes and sounds as you feel the calming effect it has on your body. Use this throughout the day to relax, beginning at the first signs of possible stress. When used often it will become an automatic response and situations that used to be stressful will be comfortable experiences. Choose to do this everyday.

Revitalizing Breath

This exercise can be used as a pick me up when tired from driving or sitting still at a monotonous task for a long period of time. It will energize you as you turn back to normal breathing and you may feel a slight wave of energy or a slight vibration go through your body. Use it as a substitute for caffeine. Sit in a comfortable upright position. Curl your tongue back on the roof of your mouth and begin the breathing exercise by breathing in and out through the nose with the mouth lightly closed. Inhale in short quick equal breaths, feeling the muscles in your neck and your diaphragm. The breaths should be as rapid and quick as possible. Do the exercise for 10-15 seconds only, increasing the duration by 5 seconds each day you feel comfortable doing so, until you are up to one minute in length.

TO HELP MAKE THIS PRACTICAL PRINTOUT USEFUL FOR YOU, RECORD SOME SITUATIONS BELOW IN WHICH IT WOULD BE BEEFICIAL FOR YOU TO PRACTICE THE ABOVE EXERCISES:

TO MAKE THIS HANDOUT EVEN MORE USEFUL AND NOT JUST ONE MORE SHEET OF PAPER STACKED IN A PILE SOMEWHERE, CARRY IT WITH YOU AND RECORD BELOW WHEN AND WHERE YOU ACTUALLY USED ONE OF THE ABOVE EXERCISES:

WHICH EXERCISE USED

WHEN USED

WHERE/SITUATION USED

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