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## What are the breathing techniques

Medically Reviewed by Nayana Ambardekar, MD on January 17, 2022 Take a deep breath in. Now let it out. You may notice a difference in how you feel already. Your breath is a powerful tool to ease stress and make you feel less anxious. Some simple breathing exercises can make a big difference if you make them part of your regular routine. Before you get started, keep these tips in mind: Choose a place to do your breathing exercise. It could be in your bed, on your living room floor, or in a comfortable chair. Don't force it. This can make you feel more stressed. Try to do it at the same time once or twice a day. Wear comfortable clothes. Many breathing exercises take only a few minutes. When you have more time, you can do them for 10 minutes or more to get even greater benefits. Most people take short, shallow breaths into their chest. It can make you feel anxious and zap your energy. With this technique, you'll learn how to take bigger breaths, all the way into your belly. Get comfortable. You can lie on your back in bed or on the floor with a pillow under your head and knees. Or you can sit in a chair with your shoulders, head, and neck supported against the back of the chair. Breathe in through your nose. Let your belly fill with air. Breathe out through your nose. Place one hand on your belly. Place the other hand on your chest. As you breathe in, feel your belly rise. As you breathe out, feel your belly lower. The hand on your belly should move more than the one that's on your chest. Take three more full, deep breaths. Breathe fully into your belly as it rises and falls with your breath. While you do deep breathing, use a picture in your mind and a word or phrase to help you feel more relaxed. Close your eyes if they're open. Take a few big, deep breaths. Breathe in. As you do that, imagine that the air is filled with a sense of peace and calm. Try to feel it throughout your body. Breathe out. While you're doing it, imagine that the air leaves with your stress and tension. Now use a word or phrase with your breath. As you breathe in, say in your mind, "I breathe in peace and calm." As you breathe out, say in your mind, "I breathe out stress and tension." Continue for 10 to 20 minutes. In this exercise, you'll match how long you breathe in with how long you breathe out. Over time, you'll increase how long you're able to breathe in and out at a time. Sit comfortably on the floor or in a chair. Breathe in through your nose. As you do it, count to five. Breathe out through your nose to the count of five. Repeat several times. Once you feel comfortable with breaths that last five counts, increase how long you breathe in and breathe out. You can work up to breaths that last up to 10 counts. In this technique, you breathe in as you tense a muscle group and breathe out as you release it. Progressive muscle relaxation helps you relax physically and mentally. Lie comfortably on the floor. Take a few deep breaths to relax. Breathe in. Tense the muscles of your feet. Breathe out. Release the tension in your feet. Breathe in. Tense your calf muscles. Breathe out. Release the tension in your calves. Work your way up your body. Tense each muscle group. This includes your legs, belly, chest, fingers, arms, shoulders, neck, and face. As you do this exercise, imagine that you're a lion. Let all of your breath out with a big, open mouth. Sit comfortably on the floor or in a chair. Breathe in through your nose. Fill your belly all the way up with air. When you can't breathe in any more, open your mouth as wide as you can. Breathe out with a "HA" sound. Repeat several times. Out with the old, stale air and in with new fresh air. That's the theme of the two most useful breathing exercises—pursed lip breathing and belly breathing—taught by pulmonary rehabilitation specialists to individuals with chronic lung diseases such as asthma and COPD. Like aerobic exercise improves your heart function and strengthens your muscles, breathing exercises can make your lungs more efficient. Why Breathing Exercises Help When you have healthy lungs, breathing is natural and easy. You breathe in and out with your diaphragm doing about 80 percent of the work to fill your lungs with a mixture of oxygen and other gases, and then to send the waste gas out. Lung HelpLine respiratory therapist Mark Courtney compares the process to a screen door with a spring, opening and shutting on its own. "Our lungs are springy, like the door. Over time, though, with asthma and especially with COPD, our lungs lose that springiness. They don't return to the same level as when you start breathing, and air gets trapped in our lungs." Courtney explains. Over time, stale air builds up, leaving less room for the diaphragm to contract and bring in fresh oxygen. With the diaphragm not working to full capacity, the body starts to use other muscles in the neck, back and chest for breathing. This translates into lower oxygen levels, and less reserve for exercise and activity. If practiced regularly, breathing exercises can help rid the lungs of accumulated stale air, increase oxygen levels and get the diaphragm to return to its job of helping you breathe. Pursed Lip Breathing This exercise reduces the number of breaths you take and keeps your airways open longer. More air is able to flow in and out of your lungs so you can be more physically active. To practice it, simply breathe in through your nose and breathe out at least twice as long through your mouth, with pursed lips. As with pursed lip breathing, start by breathing in through your nose. Pay attention to how your belly fills up with air. You can put your hands lightly on your stomach, or place a tissue box on it, so you can be aware of your belly rising and falling. Breathe out through your mouth at least two to three times as long as your inhale. Be sure to relax your neck and shoulders as you retrain your diaphragm to take on the work of helping to fill and empty your lungs. Courtney warns that although these exercises seem simple, they take some time to master. "You don't want to first try these exercises when you're short of breath," he says. "You want to try them when you're breathing OK, and then later on when you're more comfortable, you can use them when you're short of breath." Ideally, you should practice both exercises about 5 to 10 minutes every day. Page last updated: November 23, 2021 This calming breathing technique for stress, anxiety and panic takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere. You will get the most benefit if you do it regularly, as part of your daily routine. You can do it standing up, sitting in a chair that supports your back, or lying on a bed or yoga mat on the floor. Make yourself as comfortable as you can. If you can, loosen any clothes that restrict your breathing. If you're lying down, place your arms a little bit away from your sides, with the palms up. Let your legs be straight, or bend your knees so your feet are flat on the floor. If you're sitting, place your arms on the chair arms. If you're sitting or standing, place both feet flat on the ground. Whatever position you're in, place your feet roughly hip-width apart. Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, without forcing it. Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Breathe in gently and regularly. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5. You may not be able to reach 5 at first. Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again. If you find this helpful, keep doing this for 3 to 5 minutes. Page last reviewed: 18 September 2018 Next review due: 18 September 2021 Original Editor - Lucinda hampton Top Contributors - Lucinda hampton Breathing exercises are a form of exercise that can be used for a variety of health related reasons, eg: to enhance the respiratory system by improving ventilation; strengthening respiratory muscles; make breathing more efficient; and for stress reduction.[1][2]. Improper breathing can upset the oxygen and carbon dioxide exchange and contribute to anxiety, panic attacks, fatigue, and other physical and emotional disturbances.[3] Deep Breathing[edit | edit source] Deep breathing helps to relieve shortness of breath by preventing air from getting trapped in the lungs and helps inhalation of more fresh air into base of lungs. It may help help client to feel more relaxed and centered. Technique: While standing or sitting, draw elbows back slightly to allow your chest to expand. Take a deep inhalation through the nose. Retain your breath for a count of 5. Slowly release your breath by exhaling through the nose[4]. Diaphragmatic Breathing[edit | edit source] Diaphragmatic breathing is a type of breathing exercise that helps strengthen the diaphragm, an important muscle that helps with breathing, as it represents 80% of breathing. Diaphragmatic exercises help to make people feel relaxed and rested. This breathing exercise is also sometimes called belly breathing or abdominal breathing[5]. Pursed Lips Breathing[edit | edit source] Pursed-lip breathing is a breathing technique that consists of exhaling through tightly pressed (pursed) lips and inhaling through the nose with the mouth closed. It is a simple breathing technique that helps with making deep breaths slower and more intentional. This technique has been found to benefit people who have anxiety associated lung conditions eg emphysema and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)[6] Box Breathing[edit | edit source] Box breathing can be helpful with relaxation. Box breathing is a breathing exercise to assist patients with stress management and can be implemented before, during, and/or after stressful experiences. Box breathing involves visualizing a journey around the four sides of a square, pausing while travelling horizontally and breathing in while travelling up the square and out while travelling down it. This exercise can be implemented in many environments, not requiring a calm environment to be effective. Step One: Breathe in through the nose for a count of 4. Step Two: Hold breath for a count of 4. Step Three: Breathe out for a count of 4. Step Four: Hold breath for a count of 4. Repeat[7] Pranayama[edit | edit source] Pranayama is used as a technical term in yoga, it is often translated more specifically as "breath control". Traditional pranayama was based on various aspects of physical and spiritual well being, practised from a seated position. In the modern world where everyone is at their desks for long durations proceeding with pranayama in motion is a good option, and has adaptations for this. See Pranayama Mindful Breathing[edit | edit source] Muscles: Contracting red; Relaxing blue Mindfulness meditation involves focusing on your breathing and bringing attention to the present without allowing your mind to drift off to the past or future. A calming focus is chosen, including a sound ("om"), positive word ("peace"), or phrase ("breathe in calm, breathe out tension") to repeat silently as client inhales or exhales. The mind and body then let go and relax. When client notices the mind has drifted, they take a deep breath and gently return attention to the present. Active Cycle of Breathing Techniques[edit | edit source] The Active Cycle of Breathing Techniques (ACBT) is an active breathing technique performed by the patient and can be used to mobilize and clear excess pulmonary secretions and to generally improve lung function. Once ACBT has been taught, the patient can be encouraged to use it independently without the supervision of a physiotherapist. This exercise does not require the use of any special equipment. Research Findings[edit | edit source] Breathing affects all body systems; these systems in turn influence breathing. Optimal breathing patterns help to maintain homeostasis, but when breathing is disrupted, significant issues can arise. Examples of how breathing can help in health outcomes shown below: Breathing exercises can improve pulmonary function, respiratory muscle strength, exercise capacity, dyspnea, and health-related quality of life in patients with COPD[8]. Evidence suggests that diaphragmatic breathing may decrease stress as measured by physiologic biomarkers, as well psychological self-report tools[9] Evidence exists to support the use of breathing exercises in the treatment of chronic, nonspecific low back pain.[10] Breathing-based meditation decreases posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in U.S. military veterans.[11] The way of breathing decisively influences autonomic and pain processing. Deep slow breathing in concert with relaxation are essential feature in the modulation of sympathetic arousal and pain perception. Thus can be useful in chronic pain management.[12] Breathing exercises for adults with asthma may have some positive effects on quality of life, hyperventilation symptoms, and lung function[13]. See The Science of Breathing Well Give clients time to experiment with different types of breathing techniques, choosing appropriately. References[edit | edit source] † Medical dictionary Breathing exercises Available: (accessed 11.3.2022) † Lung Org Breathing exercises Available: (accessed 11.3.2022) † Paulus MP. The breathing conundrum—interoceptive sensitivity and anxiety. Depression and anxiety. 2013 Apr;30(4):315-20. Available: (accessed 3.11.2022) † Healthline 10 Breathing Techniques for Stress Relief and More Available: (accessed 12.3.2022) † Physiopedia Diaphragmatic breathing. † Very well health 8 Deep Breathing Exercises for Anxiety Available: (accessed 11.3.2022) † Norelli SK, Long A, Krepps JM. Relaxation Techniques.[Updated 2021 Jul 26]. StatPearls [Internet]. 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