



THE BENEFITS OF BREATHING DEEPLY

It's hard to believe that something as automatic and natural as breathing can be done wrong! In fact, many of us take those 20,000 per day *incorrectly* because of the stresses of daily life. Instead of breathing deeply, which brings oxygen into our bodies and gets rid of carbon dioxide, when we get stressed and anxious we breathe shallowly, using our shoulders and upper chest instead of our bellies (or diaphragms). Rapid, shallow breathing tells our adrenal glands that we are in fight, freeze, or flight mode and creates an imbalance in the oxygen and carbon dioxide in our bodies. We produce stress hormones like cortisol, and then we breathe more rapidly and shallowly, then we produce...you get the idea. This rapid, shallow breathing (hyperventilation) can make us more anxious, even creating the symptoms of a panic attack: lightheadedness, heart palpitations, tightness in the chest, headaches, etc.

Deep, mindful breathing, on the other hand, can calm us down; slow down our heart rate and lower blood pressure; reduce stress hormones; balance the oxygen and carbon dioxide in our bodies; help us relax, and many other beneficial physical and mental responses.

You can Google diaphragmatic breathing, read books on how to do it, or just begin by following these simple instructions for starters. When you can breathe mindfully and deeply throughout the day, then it might be worth your time to learn more. Two important tips: begin your practice when you are relaxed and not stressed; and when you first start, try and find a quiet spot to sit without interruption for 5 minutes.

Sit (or lay down on your back) with your eyes closed, in a quiet place. No TV, radio, music, or other distractions.

Put one hand on your belly and the other higher up on your chest.

Take a few breaths the "typical" or "normal" way you always do and notice what happens to the hand on your belly and the hand on your chest. Which one rises and falls?

Next, breathe in through your nose slowly while counting to five, making your belly expand. Breathe out through your mouth while counting to five, making your belly sink in.

Do this for as long as you'd like but try for 5 minutes at first, really concentrating on belly breathing. Once you can do this breathing easily and automatically, you won't need to position your hands, and you can do it anywhere with your eyes open, and in any environment. Instant stress relief!

A good book on breathing for wellness is: *Keep Calm and Breathe: 10 Breathing Techniques to Bring Awareness, Relieve Stress, Reduce Anxiety, and Change Your Life Forever!* by Little Pearly and Julie Schoen