Diaphragmatic Breathing

Body-Based Skills: Breathing From Your Belly

Diaphragmatic breathing, also called belly breathing, is a way of breathing slowly and deeply with the large muscle under your lungs. That muscle is your diaphragm. When you feel stressed, your breathing often moves up into your chest and becomes quick and shallow. This worksheet helps you practice breathing from your belly instead.

1 The hand check

Lie on your back with your knees bent, or sit up straight in a chair. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other on your belly, just below your ribs. Breathe normally for a moment and notice which hand moves more.

Hand on chest Stays mostly still	Your chest hand should move very little. If it rises a lot, your breath is still high in your chest.
Hand on belly Rises and falls	Your belly hand rises as you breathe in and falls as you breathe out. This shows your diaphragm is doing the work.

Why does this work? *When your diaphragm does the work, each breath is deeper, so you breathe more slowly without trying. Slow breathing turns on the body's rest and digest system, which lowers your heart rate and helps your muscles relax. In one small study, healthy adults who trained in slow belly breathing for eight weeks had lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol and fewer negative feelings afterward.*

2 Step by step

- **Breathe in** slowly through your nose for a count of about 4. Let your belly push your hand up.
- **Keep your chest still.** The hand on your chest should stay as quiet as you can manage.
- **Breathe out** slowly through pursed lips, as if you were blowing through a straw. Make the breath out a little longer than the breath in, and feel your belly fall.
- **Repeat** for 5 to 10 minutes, three or four times a day, when you are calm.

3 Tips

- Lying down is the easiest way to learn. Once it feels natural, try it sitting, and then standing.
- If you feel dizzy or light-headed, stop and breathe normally.
- If you have a lung or heart condition, ask your doctor which breathing exercises are right for you.

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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4 Practice log

Rate how tense you feel from 0 (calm) to 10 (the most tense you can imagine), before and after each practice.

Date	Position	Minutes	Before	After	What I noticed
Mon 3 Nov	*Lying down*	*5*	*6*	*3*	*My belly hand moved more by the end*

5 Making it a habit

Times in my day when I could practice:

Example: In bed before I get up, and on my lunch break

If anxiety or panic attacks keep coming back, or breathing skills are not enough to help, talk to a therapist. They can help you build a plan that fits you.

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