

BREATHE TO RELAX

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This is how to breathe deeply and slowly from the very bottom parts of your lungs, so that your belly moves in and out as you breathe. Slow, deep breathing helps you relax and feel better.

1. You may sit up or lie down. Loosen any tight clothes. Get very comfortable. Relax. Put one hand near your belly button. Put the other hand on your chest near your heart (it is easier to learn deep belly breathing lying down).
2. Begin to breathe gently so that the hand on your belly moves up and down more than the hand on your chest. Your belly should stick out as you breathe in. Your upper chest should hardly move at all. The action is at or below the waist. Feel your lower ribs expand.
3. Breathe in through your nose. You may breathe out through your nose or your mouth, whichever feels the most relaxing. You might want to breathe out with a gentle sigh. Find what feels best for you. Don't try too hard. Relax. Just let it happen.
4. Now pay attention to breathing slowly. To learn this skill, practice counting your breaths. When you breathe in, count "one" silently and slowly. As you breathe out, count "two" even more slowly. Repeat, letting your breathing rate naturally slow down.
5. When you can do the "one-two breath" easily, try counting "1,2,3,4" while you breathe in. Hold your breath just for a moment, then breathe out while silently counting "1,2,3,4".
6. For even more relaxation, try slowly counting "1,2,3,4" on the in breath, hold, and count "1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8" on the out breath. You may even sigh as you let all the air go out. Feel yourself relaxing deeply on the out breath. Feel the tension and worry leave your body with your breath. You might want to think peaceful thoughts or imagine a beautiful place (this is the "four and eight breath").
7. Try different counts to find the best one for you. Just remember that for the most relaxation, the out breath needs to be longer than the in breath.
8. For extreme nervousness, the "four by four breath" helps many people. Count "1,2,3,4" on the in breath. Then hold your breath in for a count of "1,2,3,4". Then let your breath out and count "1,2,3,4". Then hold all your breath out and count "1,2,3,4". Then begin again. Do this breath for four "in, hold, out, hold" cycles. Then rest and breathe normally. After a few minutes, you may repeat the "four by four breath" again. Then rest. Do the breath easily, without straining, in a rhythm that is comfortable for you. Be sure that your belly is moving in and out as you breathe. Breathe deeply so you get enough air (some people can even control anxiety attacks with this easy breath).
9. Take a deep belly breath often during the day to keep from getting nervous. Let ordinary things that happen during the day be reminders to take a deep belly breath (like when the phone rings, at meal time, at a traffic signal, at bed time, etc.).
10. At least two times a day, spend 5-15 minutes practicing the relaxation breaths.