

BREATHE AWAY STRESS

Most of the medications used to treat anxiety are highly addictive and should only be used occasionally. But fortunately we have stress relievers such as exercise and breathing at our disposal. This simple exercise should noticeably relax and yet invigorate you, and if used faithfully should work as well as a pill to ward off a panic attack or other experience of anxiety.

Sit comfortably in a chair or lie flat on your back and breathe very deeply. This will oxygenate your brain and relax your body. Often anxiety causes shallow, rapid breathing, which in turn tells the brain to be afraid. Purposely reversing the physical expression of anxiety and breathing as one would while totally relaxed, can work reflectively on the brain to help it feel safe and calm. The choice to breath slowly also activates the cerebral cortex, putting it “in charge” of the limbic brain, which calms down like a child in the presence of a loving, responsible parent.

Use these three simple steps:

1. Starting in the lower abdomen, fill your lungs to capacity by breathing through your nose very slowly to the count of eight.
2. Purse your lips as if you’re breathing through a straw, then breathe out slowly to the count of twelve through the “straw.”
3. Do this ten to twelve times in a row. Don’t rush it, you could hyperventilate.

In addition to the breathing, you can engage in systematic relaxation to help release tension from the body. Here’s a method I use:

1. Tense the muscles while inhaling.
2. Release the muscles while exhaling.
3. Use the following sequence: Right foot, right lower leg and foot, entire right leg, left foot, left lower leg and foot, entire left leg, right hand, right forearm and hand, entire right arm, left hand, left forearm and hand, entire left arm, abdomen, chest, neck and shoulders.