

Breathing Exercise

There are many different breathing exercises. To get the most benefit, breathing exercises should be practiced every day, preferably not immediately after eating or on an empty stomach.

Abdominal Breathing Technique

Breathing exercises such as this one should be done twice a day or whenever you find yourself under stress, your mind dwelling on upsetting thoughts, or when you are experiencing pain. Abdominal breathing is just one of the many breathing exercises, but it is the most important one to learn before exploring other techniques. The more it is practiced, the more natural it will become, improving your mind and body's internal balanced rhythm.

- Place one hand on your chest and the other hand on your abdomen. When you take a deep breath in, the hand on the abdomen should rise higher than the one on the chest. This ensures that the diaphragm is pulling air into the bases of the lungs.
- After exhaling through your mouth, take a slow deep breath in through your nose, allowing your mind to focus on the undersurface of the nose where the air enters the body. Inhale for a count of 4.
- Slowly exhale for a count of 6-8. As all the air is released with exhalation, gently contract your abdominal muscles to completely evacuate the remaining air in your lungs. It is important to remember that we deepen respirations by completely exhaling air, rather than inhaling more of it.
- Repeat the cycle 19 more times for a total of twenty deep breaths.

TIPS:

- In general, exhalation should be twice as long as inhalation.
- A rate of one full breath (inhalation and exhalation) every 10 seconds (for a total of 6 breaths per minute) has been found to be most helpful for stabilizing the nervous system and reducing blood pressure.
- The use of the hands on the chest and abdomen is needed only to help you train your breathing. Once you feel comfortable with your ability to breathe into your abdomen, you no longer need to place your hands on your chest and abdomen.
- Once you feel comfortable with this technique, you may want to include words that can enhance the exercise. Examples to say to yourself might include "relaxation" (with inhalation) and "stress" or "anger" (with exhalation), so that you are breathing "in with the good and out with the bad." The idea is that you bring in the feeling/emotion that you want with inhalation and release those you do not want with exhalation.

PATIENT HANDOUT



Breathing Exercise

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

The reader is encouraged to enroll in a yoga (particularly a hatha or pranayama yoga) class at a local community or fitness center. Most well-trained instructors will educate students about various breathing techniques and how the breath is used to enhance well-being with yoga practice.

An excellent book to help explore more advanced breathing techniques is *Conscious Breathing* by Gay Hendricks (New York, Bantam, 1995).

An excellent audiotape, *Breathing: The Master Key to Self Healing*, by Andrew Weil, discusses the health benefits of breathing and directs the listener through eight breathing exercises (Sounds True, 1999).

The information in this handout is for general education. Please work with your health care practitioner to use this information in the best way possible to promote your health.

This handout was created by David Rakel, MD, Asst. Prof. and Director of the Integrative Medicine Program, Dept. of Family Medicine, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Date Created: August 6, 2007

Notes: