

Worksheet Eight: Diaphragmatic or abdominal breathing

When tense, a person's breathing is rapid and shallow, only using the top third of their lungs. When breathing like this too much carbon dioxide is released and this can lead to: light-headedness, breathlessness, feeling of suffocation, blurred vision, and numbness or tingling in hands or feet as well as a hot, flustered feeling. This is called hyperventilation and can lead to constantly feeling anxious and apprehensive and can possibly lead to panic attacks.

Learning to use more of your lungs, by diaphragmatic/abdominal breathing can reduce the chances of this happening and can stop the cycle of getting tense, breathing shallowly and then feeding the tension with anxiety and so on.

1. Sit as comfortably as possible in a chair or lie on the floor with your head, back and arms supported
2. Close your eyes if that will help you concentrate
3. Place one hand on your stomach right beneath your rib cage and the other on your chest
4. Breathe faster and feel how shallow and rapid your breathing is and how only the chest moves as you breathe
5. Now breathe in deeply and slowly, concentrating on pushing the air as low and deep into your lungs as possible, feeling the hand on your stomach move up as you do it
6. When you are breathing deeply into your lungs the hand on your chest should hardly move at all
7. When you have taken a full breath, hold it briefly before breathing out
8. Keep practising until you think you can do it relatively easily

How to use abdominal breathing to reduce tension and anxiety:

1. Rate your level of tension and, if you can, count your pulse rate
2. Breathe in slowly counting to four, before breathing out to the count of four (four seconds in, four seconds out). Repeat this 10 times. Hold the final breath for 10 seconds, and then breathe out
3. Now re-rate your level of tension and take your pulse rate and see if they have changed
4. Repeat as necessary

Controlled breathing can help reduce overall levels of tension when used consciously several times a day. It is also useful when faced with stressful, high-anxiety or high-risk situations when a lapse is possible.

Adapted from:

[http://notes.med.unsw.edu.au/NDARCWeb.nsf/resources/AOD5/\\$file/Controlled+abdominal+breathing.pdf](http://notes.med.unsw.edu.au/NDARCWeb.nsf/resources/AOD5/$file/Controlled+abdominal+breathing.pdf)