

What is calm breathing?

Calm breathing, sometimes called “*diaphragmatic breathing*” because it is from your diaphragm (the large muscle located at the base of your lungs). It is a technique that helps you *slow* down your breathing when you’re feeling stressed or anxious.

How can calm breathing help me?

Breathing is something we usually do not pay much attention to. With calm breathing, you take the time to focus on slowing your breathing and relaxing your body from head to toe. Calm breathing has been suggested to help with symptoms of anxiety, sleep problems, chronic pain, and stress.

When we feel anxious, we tend to take short, shallow breaths or even hold our breath for short periods of time. Calm breathing helps you to focus on your breath in order to calm yourself and relax.



How can I practice calm breathing?

- Sit comfortably in a chair with your feet on the floor. You can lie down if you wish.
- Fold your hands on your belly.
- Breathe in slowly and calmly. Fill up the lower belly with a normal breath. Try not to breathe in too heavily. The hands should move up when you breathe in, as if you are filling up a balloon. Avoid lifting the shoulders as you inhale or filling up your chest. Rather, breathe from your diaphragm (the large muscle located at the base of your lungs) or stomach. Your shoulders and chest area should stay relaxed and still.

- Breathe out slowly to the count of “5.” Try to slow down the rate of the exhale. After the exhale, hold for 2-3 seconds before inhaling again.
- Work to continue to slow down the pace of the breath.
- Practice this for about 10 minutes.
- This works best if you practice this 2 times each day for 10 minutes each time. Try to find a regular time to practice this each day.

How can calm breathing help me when I am stressed out?

A benefit of calm breathing is that you can practice it at any time, in any location. Breathing is a built-in coping mechanism. Calm breathing can be used when you are alone or when you are around others, and it can help with a variety of stressors you might be feeling. The next time you find yourself in a stressful situation, try taking a few calm breaths and focus on relaxing your body and mind. Below are a few examples of times you may find calm breathing useful.

At home:

- When you are tossing and turning as you try to fall asleep
- As you feel yourself becoming frustrated or upset while having a stressful conversation with a family member, friend, or roommate

In public:

- Before an exam, interview, meeting, or any other anxiety-inducing event
- When your day has been busy or hectic, and you are feeling overwhelmed

Where can I get more information?

- You may try searching for “Calm Breathing” or “Diaphragmatic Breathing” on YouTube to find videos that will walk you through the process of calm breathing.

- <http://www.Mindful.org>: an informative website that provides information about simple techniques, including deep breathing, that will help you to relax and reduce stress in your everyday life.

For more information:

- University of Michigan Depression Center
- 1-800-475-MICH or 734-936-4400
- <http://www.depressioncenter.org/toolkit>

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