

Breathing Techniques

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Learning to breathe from your diaphragm is a skill you were born with and have most probably lost. Babies naturally breathe from their diaphragms, and so do you when you are asleep. Diaphragmatic breathing may take some practice to relearn and once you have the skill again you can reduce the tension in your body rapidly by breathing this way for 5 minutes.

Learning to Breathe from your Diaphragm

You will either need a partner or a comfortable chair in front of mirror. Place your hands on your abdomen, a little above your waistline, sit comfortably in the chair and take a deep breath.

For many of us, a deep breath involves filling the upper part of our lungs. We may only fill 140% of our lungs with air when we take the standard “deep breath.”

If your deep breaths focus on filling the upper part of your lungs your shoulders will move up as you breathe in and down as you breathe out.

If you are breathing from your diaphragm your shoulders will move very little or not at all, and you will see your hands (on your abdomen) move out as you breathe in and then move in as you breathe out. Watch yourself in the mirror or have your partner watch you as you breathe.

Do your shoulders move rather than your abdomen (where your hands are)? Focus on breathing down to your diaphragm. Many people can do this with practice, simply by focusing on their hands moving in as they breathe out and out as they breathe in.

Still having problems? One trick some find helpful is to use their hands to gently push their abdomen in as they breathe out and then focus on the abdomen pushing their hands out as they breathe in. Another trick that works for some is to pay attention to how they are breathing as they are going to sleep. As you move into sleep your breathing will change into diaphragmatic breathing.

Take your time and be patient with yourself. It may take some time to get yourself back in the routine of diaphragmatic breathing. If you need help, feel free to contact **Counseling Services** in the **Powell Resource Center** (ext 6923 or 6144).

Once you are beginning to get the hang of it, practice breathing this way for about 5 minutes. You don't have to breathe particularly deep. Simply allow yourself to breathe comfortably. It may be interesting to notice how different kinds of diaphragmatic breaths work for you. How deep or how shallow depends on what works for you.

Deep breathing can help in two ways. First, you can do deep breathing anywhere you can sit or lie down. You can also do deep breathing in a way which others are unlikely to notice. Taking 30 seconds to deep breath can drop anxiety and stress levels enough to improve performance. Try it the next time you begin to panic because you can't remember the answer to that question. And while you are deep breathing, remind yourself that you did study and it will be OK.

For other useful tips about breathing or to learn other relaxation techniques check out *The Relaxation &*

Stress Reduction Workbook by Martha Davis, Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman, and Matthew McKay. It is now in its 4th edition and each edition covers breathing techniques.