

Relaxed Breathing

Relaxed breathing is a tool used to help you relax and to ease muscle tension. It also can help relieve pain.

When a person is stressed, it's easy to get into the habit of taking short, shallow breaths. These typically are centered in the upper chest and shoulders. When you practice relaxed breathing, you work to breathe from your belly. These deep breaths can help:

- Release painful tension from your muscles.
- Stimulate your body to produce chemicals that help lower your blood pressure and heart rate.
- Create a calming effect on other functions related to stress in the body.

Relaxed breathing also is called abdominal breathing and diaphragmatic breathing. It can be used anywhere and anytime.

HOW TO DO THIS

You may wish to use a relaxed-breathing app, video or CD to guide you until you are comfortable doing this on your own. Practice at home when it is convenient for you. The more practice you do, the more prepared you'll be to use this tool when you need it.

- Find a quiet, private place where you can sit or lie comfortably.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose until your lungs feel comfortably full. This could be to a count of 4, for example. Think about breathing from your abdomen, also called the belly. Your belly should move out, or expand, as you breathe in. Think of your belly like a balloon. It gets bigger as you inhale and smaller as you exhale.
- Breathe out slowly, to the count of 4. Make a small circle with your lips. Imagine blowing on a candle just hard enough to make the flame flicker but not blow out.

At first, it may feel awkward to breathe this way. Practice until it feels natural and relaxing.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- If you first tried this exercise sitting down, also try it while you're lying down. Put a piece of paper on your belly so you can see it move.
- Slow, smooth, even breathing is best. If you wish, place one hand on your upper chest and the other hand on your belly. This helps you feel your muscles as you breathe. When you can feel the muscles, you're more likely to extend your belly further than your chest when you inhale.
- If it helps, breathe into a whistle or on a feather so you can see and hear when you exhale.
- As you start to feel comfortable with this breathing, try to extend your exhale a little longer.

OTHER RESOURCES

Relaxed breathing CDs or tapes may be sold in medical stores or bookstores, or you may be able to rent them from your library. Or you could utilize apps.

- **Calm App.** This offers images for relaxed breathing: calm.com
- **Breath2relax App.** It shows relaxing scenes and a metronome. You can adjust the rate (the timer) for your inhaled and exhaled.
- **Inner Balance App.** This is a biofeedback tool with a breath pacer. It can help you adjust your inhaled and exhaled rate.
- **Video: Relaxation and Relaxed Breathing** mayoclinic.org/pe?mc=MC7698-10

