

Counselling Services

DEEP DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

How to do it:

Many people, especially when they are upset, stressed, anxious, angry, or in pain, breathe only from the **upper** part of their chest. Instead, try taking slow, **deep** breaths from the **abdomen**. Rest your hands along the bottom of your rib cage, so that the fingertips of each hand are just touching. Your fingertips should move apart slightly as you breathe in, then come together again as your lungs empty.

In order to keep the rate of breathing **slow**, count to yourself as you breathe. **Initially try:**

In, one thousand, 2, one thousand, 3, one thousand, **Out**, one thousand, 2, one thousand, 3, one thousand. As you become proficient you could increase to six counts in and six counts out. Make sure that you breathe out for at least as long as you breathe in.

Why to do it:

Deep diaphragmatic breathing (or abdominal breathing) is a helpful technique for dealing with pain, anxiety, stress and anger. It assists in several ways:

1. **By helping you to relax.** Deep breathing forms an important part of many relaxation procedures. As well, deep breathing alone can be enough to induce relaxation, without the need for listening to tapes or performing lengthy procedures.
2. **By acting as a distraction strategy.** If you concentrate very hard on your breathing, you will be less conscious of pain or other stressors. Any time you notice your attention turning to such stressors, simply shift your attention to your breathing.
3. **By reversing some of the physical symptoms of anxiety.** When people become anxious or stressed they often take shallow, rapid breaths or they may even hyperventilate. This can result in dizziness, blurred vision, pins and needles and chest pain. Slow deep breathing can help to relieve such symptoms quite rapidly.

Practice:

Like any other skill, deep breathing needs to be practised. Try to spend a few minutes, once or twice each day, practising breathing exercises. Initially you may find it easiest to lie down or sit in a comfortable chair while you practise. As you become proficient, however, try to vary your position and the setting so that you will be prepared to use your new skill in any situation that arises.

QUT Counselling Services offers professional assistance with this and other issues

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