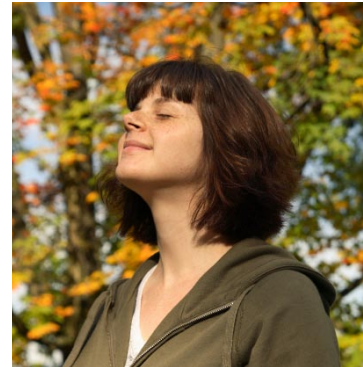


Abdominal Breathing

Why is the quality of my breathing so important?

Many of us develop the habit of breathing in a very shallow way, often utilising only a small percentage of lung capacity. This is also a common pattern associated with the state of anxiety. This shallow form of breathing creates more tension and can lead to further anxiety. Check your breathing right now, how much lung capacity are you utilising?



Good quality breathing has many physiological benefits and can become a great tool for relaxation. Making breathing more conscious is a very good habit to develop; we can easily use our breathing more consciously many times per day, even when we are doing other things.

The following abdominal breathing exercise is a good way to gain the associated benefits and with practice it will help to remind you to use better quality breathing on a daily basis. This breathing technique is also an excellent way of calming the chatter in your mind at bedtime. Experiment with it and see how it works for you.

Abdominal Breathing Practice

Wear loose comfortable clothes and choose a space where you won't be disturbed. Breathing through the nostrils is preferred unless you find that difficult. The key to good breathing practice is to be relaxed in the shoulders, diaphragm and the abdomen. Lay flat on your back, legs extended or with legs bent if you find that more comfortable. Place both hands on the belly, allowing the elbows to rest on the floor so the arms are fully relaxed. If you prefer, this practice is also effective in a seated position.

First notice, without judgement, your own breathing pattern. Keep a focus on your body being soft. Now bring the awareness to the abdomen.

Abdominal Breath

On the inhalation allow the lungs to fill as the diaphragm moves down, the belly relaxes and expands. On the exhalation the lungs are emptied and the belly releases down toward the spine. Breathe in gently and the belly raises, breathe out and the belly falls back towards the spine. Feel the abdomen expanding and contracting with the hands resting on the belly.

The focus is on the belly, not the chest, the chest remains passive, although in the beginning the chest can also move too. You don't need to push the abdomen out or pull it back in, just let it occur naturally, observing how it feels to breathe in this way. Don't force the breath in any way, in time and with practice the size of the inhalations and exhalations will naturally increase.

Be aware of any tension you are holding in your body and relax that area. Practice for 5-10 minutes or for as long as is comfortable. To keep the mind focused on what you are doing,

count 1 on the inhale and 2 on the exhale, 1 on the inhale etc etc.. This should help to prevent your mind from wandering; if it does start to wander, gently bring your attention back to your breathing without judgment.

Benefits

- Proper use of the diaphragm signifies that the lower lungs are working efficiently
- Improves lymphatic drainage from the lungs
- Massages the liver, stomach, intestines and other organs that lie beneath it
- Stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for calming the system
- Oxygenates the system and helps to remove unwanted bodily toxins
- Induces a calm and relaxed state

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