

Abdominal Breathing Exercise

1. Note the level of tension you're feeling. Then place one hand on your abdomen right beneath your rib cage.
2. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose into the "bottom" of your lungs-in other words, send the air as low down as you can. If you're breathing from your abdomen, your hand should actually rise. Your chest should move only slightly while your abdomen expands. (In abdominal breathing, the diaphragm-the muscle that separates the chest cavity-moves downward. In so doing, it causes the muscles surrounding the abdominal cavity to push outward.)
3. When you've taken in a full breath, pause for a moment and then exhale slowly through your nose or mouth, depending on your preference. Be sure to exhale fully. As you exhale, allow your whole body to just let go (you might visualize your arms and legs going loose like a rag doll).
4. Do ten slow, full abdominal breaths. Try to keep your breathing smooth and regular, without gulping in a big breath or letting your breath out all at once. It will help to slow down your breathing if you slowly count to four on the inhale (1-2-3-4) and then slowly count to four on the exhale. Remember to pause briefly at the end of each inhalation. Count from ten down to one counting backward one number with each exhalation. The process should go like this:

Slow inhale...Pause ... Slow exhale ("Ten.")

Slow inhale...Pause ... Slow exhale ("Nine.")

Slow inhale...Pause ... Slow exhale ("Eight.")

And so on down to one. If you start to feel light-headed while practicing abdominal breathing, stop for fifteen to twenty seconds, then start again.

5. Extend the exercises if you wish by doing two or three "sets" of abdominal breaths, remembering to count backward from ten to one for each set (each exhalation counts as one number). Five full minutes of abdominal breathing will have a pronounced effect in reducing anxiety or early symptoms of panic. Some people prefer to count from one to ten instead. Feel free to do this if it suits you.