

PRACTICING YOUR BREATHING SKILLS

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Read slowly, with pauses, to allow time for response.

This CD is designed to help you practice a few basic breathing skills. Listen to it several times in order to get these basic skills down. Then, when you choose to use them in your daily life, they will come to you more easily. Feel free to listen to this tape again any time you want to refresh your skills.

Before you begin, find a private time and place in which to concentrate. If at any point you need more time to follow my instructions, then just place this CD on "pause" or on "stop" until you are done.

Let's start by noticing your current breathing pattern.

Begin right now by breathing gently, not deeply.
[Pause.]

Notice what part of your upper torso is lifting up as you inhale. Find out if it is your upper chest that rises with each inhale, or whether it seems to be your stomach area. [Pause.]

Teaching Natural Breathing

Place one hand over top of that area which is rising up as you inhale. If that area is your stomach region, then you are breathing in a natural, easy, appropriate manner for relaxation and comfort. In fact, let's name that

breathing pattern as "Natural Breathing." It's also known as "abdominal breathing."

As I'm talking, continue to focus on your gentle breathing into your stomach.

Are you breathing in your upper chest right now? [Pause.]

If you want to encourage a relaxed state, then you need to help those inhales to move down into your stomach.

There is a sheet of muscles just underneath your rib cage called the diaphragm. As you take an inhale to the lower part of your lungs, it pushes that diaphragm down.

The diaphragm then pushes on your abdomen and makes it protrude. So you are not actually breathing into your stomach, but your stomach will rise up.

Take a few moments to practice this kind of breathing.

These are gentle breaths, not deep breaths. [Pause.]

With each inhale let your abdomen rise up. [Pause.]

With each exhale allow your abdomen to fall back to its normal, comfortable position. [Pause.]

If you are having any difficulty breathing into your abdominal region, then on the inhale consciously protrude your stomach, and let it relax as you exhale.

You can also practice when lying on your back on the floor.

This will make it easier to notice the change in your breathing from your chest to your belly.

I call this "Natural Breathing" because it is the way that you should breathe throughout the day, unless you are involved in some kind of physical activity or in a true emergency situation. At that point your breathing will automatically shift to your upper chest. You won't even need to think about it.

Teaching the Calming Breath

There are three breathing techniques I will be sharing with you. Natural Breathing is the first. The second is called the Calming Breath. The Calming Breath is a deep breathing technique, so let's start with the basics of

deep breathing. Let me describe it first, then we'll try it together. Here's how it goes:

After a full exhale, you will begin to take a long, slow inhale, first filling the lower part of your lungs, which would cause your abdomen to rise (as we've just been doing), and, second, filling the upper part of your lungs. So it is a two-stage inhale: first lower lungs, then upper lungs. As you complete that inhale, your exhale will be slow, through pursed lips, as though you have your mouth on a straw. You exhale first from the upper part of your lungs and then the lower part.

Let's try this together now. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other on your stomach. On your next exhale, fill your lower belly first, with a slow inhale.

[Pause.]

Continue that inhale until you fill your upper lungs. [Pause.]

Once you have completed that full inhale

then slowly,

through pursed lips,

exhale, first from your upper lungs

and then your lower lungs.

Now just rest easily for a few moments. Your breathing will take care of itself. [Pause.]

Let's try that again.

After your next exhale

take a nice slow deep inhale, into your abdomen first,

then your upper lungs.

Now exhale slowly, pursing your lips,

making a little sound as you are exhaling. [Pause.]

Now let your breath become quiet -- no need to do anything

to your breath after that exhale. Your breathing takes

place automatically, unconsciously, so after that deep

exhale you can just rest, and notice how your breathing

comes without effort, naturally.

That's deep breathing: taking a full breath and exhaling

slowly. Now we'll add a couple things to create the

Calming Breath.

Let me walk you through a Calming Breath, then you can practice it. You start by exhaling all the way so that you can take a bigger breath. Then inhale into your lower lungs first, then your upper lungs. Next, exhale slowly, and let yourself start to relax during that exhale. During that exhale, you'll say some word that encourages your physical relaxation, and you'll also begin to loosen some of the muscles in your body.

That's how it goes. Now it's your turn.

Start by adjusting your body. Sit comfortably with your back straight and your body well supported in your chair.

On your next exhale,

let out all that air.

Inhale nice and slowly,

first filling your abdomen,

then your upper lungs.

Now begin to exhale very slowly.

This time as you exhale, say the word "relax" under your breath,

or "calm," or "loosen," or any word you'd like that feels supportive of this process of letting go of tensions.

And exhale nice and slowly.

Let the face relax,

the jaw relax,

the forehead and the back of your neck relax.

And any other parts of the body that feel tense.

As you finish that exhale, continue to let your muscles loosen and relax,

because the more your body is loose and relaxed,

the clearer your mind becomes,

the easier you can think,

the simpler it is to choose the actions that would be best for you. [Pause.]

Let's try that one more time. This time just focus on loosening the muscles in your face and neck.

When you are ready,

let all the air out on your next exhale.

Now take that nice deep, long inhale,
filling those lower lungs
then the upper lungs.
After those lungs fill,
exhale ever so slowly and use that calming word:
"relax" or "calm" or "let go."
Let that word mean something to you,
and respond to it.
Let your face melt into relaxation.
Loosen the muscles in your jaw,
your forehead,
the back of your neck
and your face.
At the bottom of that exhale,
simply let your mind go blank.
Let your breathing take care of itself now.
Just be empty,
or pay attention to how your body feels, if you like.
Let yourself simplify your mind,
quiet your mind,
or let it go blank. [Pause.]
Sit there quietly for another two short little breaths, or
about ten to fifteen seconds.
You'll notice, after a deep inhale like this,
that your body doesn't actually require much breathing for a
few seconds,
so those next few breaths might be fairly light and fairly far
apart.
After those two gentle breaths are over, you would typically
return to your daily activity.
When taking that Calming Breath, it's important that your
long exhale is slow,
and I mean S – L – O – W.
If you feel in any way that you might be exhaling quickly,
then practice exhaling to the count of "eight" or "ten."
That will give you a good marker for how long you ought
to be letting out this particular exhale.

There is one other way to do this Calming Breath. This process will assist you if, when you become anxious, you tend to experience a rapid heartbeat, called tachycardia, or if you tend to hyperventilate.

The change you will make here is to hold your breath after you take that big inhale. At the top of your inhale, you will hold to the count of "three" before you begin exhaling. In medicine this process is called bradycardia, which means a lowering of the heart rate. In fact, some studies have shown that, in people with rapid heartbeat, this particular process can reduce the heart rate 20 to 30 beats per minute within one heart beat.

So if your heart races when you are anxious, you might want to use this one.

Let's try this form of the Calming Breath.

On your next full exhale,

take a nice slow inhale

and hold it to the count of "three." ("Thousand-one, thousand-two, thousand-three")

Now exhale slowly. Say that word under your breath: "relax", "calm", or "quiet."

Take the next dozen seconds or so to respond to that word and let those tensions drain.

As your body becomes calm,

the mind becomes clear,

free all those tensions and worries. [Pause.]

Now you can return to normal gentle breathing.

Be sure to practice this Calming Breath during your day, and also use it anytime that you feel any symptoms or sensations that are uncomfortable to you.

This is a skill that you can use often.

The Calming Breath does just what its name implies. It helps the body to quiet down and not be so excitable,

it assists the muscles to relax,

and it helps slow your heart rate if it's going fast.

That's why I call it the Calming Breath, because of its job: to assist in calming the body down.

Teaching Calming Counts

I have presented two of our three skills so far:

Natural Breathing, which is gentle breaths into your belly,
and the Calming Breath, which is a special kind of deep
breathing.

The third breathing technique is called Calming Counts.

This involves one Calming Breath, and then counting each
Natural Breath that follows the Calming Breath, for a
total of ten breaths. You will begin your count at "ten"
on the first exhale, "nine" on the second exhale, and so
forth, counting down to "one" on the tenth exhale.

Follow my directions now, and you can learn it while
practicing it.

After your next exhale,
take that Calming Breath: a nice, slow, deep inhale,
filling your lower lungs and upper lungs,
then a slow exhale,
saying that word "relax" or "calm,"
and letting your mind become quiet. [Pause.]

Now simply follow your breathing.

Notice each breath you take, gently, from your belly.

Don't try to control your breath...just follow it.

On that first exhale, count silently "ten,"
and perhaps see that number one in your mind's eye.

On the second exhale that comes,
count "two" and see that number,
perhaps with its own color.

Continue now at your own pace,
counting each exhale.

And with each exhale,
let your body relax just a little more.

With each count downward,
see that number in your mind's eye,
and let your mind become a little quieter.

Gently.

Slowly.

No rush.

No effort.

Just follow each breath
and relax more and more.

When you get to "one,"
take a mental scan through your body.

Find out how your body feels when you start getting relaxed
and quiet like this.

As you practice this skill during your day, concentrate on the
idea of "quiet mind and loose body."

The more you practice patience during this brief minute-
and-a-half, the more rewards you will notice.

The Calming Breath and Calming Counts can be used
whenever you are feeling worried or tense.

But as you are learning any of these breathing skills, practice
them on a daily basis, and practice during times when
you are relatively comfortable. Fortunately, practicing
them will also be an excellent way to take a break during
your day.

Any time when you want to encourage this calming
response in your body and mind, try the Calming Breath
or Calming Counts.

As you improve in your skill, through your practice, you will
notice that there will be a certain quietness in your
mind,

a calmness in your body.

You'll start getting immediate benefit whenever you
practice, and that will be reinforcing.

Now feel free to take a few more minutes to practice these
skills on your own before turning off this CD and
returning to your daily activities.