

When we're stressed or anxious we often breathe too fast – which has a big impact on our stress and anxiety. When we breathe too fast we send a message to our brain that says we're under threat, which in turn causes our body to get *more* stressed and anxious. To reverse this we need to relax. A great way of relaxing the body (and in turn teaching the mind to relax) is breathing.

- ✦ To see what your breathing rate is, sit quietly and count the number of breaths you take in during a 60 second period.
- ✦ If it is greater than 14, try to slow your breathing rate down by using one of the following techniques. Whenever you use any of these techniques, remember to breathe from your diaphragm (see the 'Buddha Belly Breathing' technique below for instructions). And do each technique for at least 3-5 minutes.
- ✦ Then, after you have tried a technique, calculate your breathing rate again. Count the number of breaths you take in during a 60 second period, and compare this to your initial breathing rate.

Practicing several times a day will help you get your breath into a 'normal' range of 10 to 14 breaths per minute, and will reduce stress, anxiety and tension. Also, if you practice when you're not under stress or feeling anxious (e.g., when you're stopped at the traffic lights, doing the dishes, walking the dog, having a shower), this will make it easier to do these techniques when stress or anxiety takes hold.

Buddha Belly Breathing

Lay the palms of your hands on your stomach just below your rib cage, middle fingers touching each other, and take a slow deep breath in through your nose. As your diaphragm pushes down, your stomach will slightly expand causing your fingertips to separate. This movement indicates full use of the lungs, resulting in a truly deep breath.

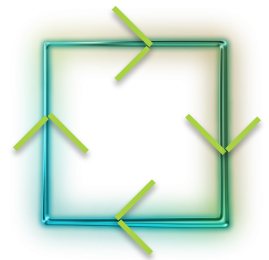


Alternate Nostril Breathing

Hold your right thumb over your right nostril and inhale deeply through your left nostril. At the peak of inhalation, close off your left nostril with your ring finger, then exhale through your right nostril. Continue this pattern, inhaling through your right nostril, closing it off with the right thumb and exhaling through your left nostril.

The Breath Square

Breathe in for a count of 4, hold for a count of 4, out for a count of 4, hold for a count of 4.



Complete Breath Breathing

Put your left hand on your belly and your right hand on your chest. As you breathe in through your nose fill your diaphragm (belly) by breathing so that your left hand goes up when you inhale and then continue inhaling filling up your upper chest so that your right hand goes up also. Feel your chest and rib cage expand. Exhale slowly through your mouth, relaxing your chest and rib cage.

The 4-7-8 Breath

Breathe in through your nose for a count of 4, hold for a count of 7, then exhale through your mouth for a count of 8. Continue this exercise counting 4-7-8.

Breath Moving

Each time you breathe in, imagine you are moving your breath to the top of your head. Each time you breathe out, imagine you are moving your breath to the base of your spine.

The Breath Sniff

Do this exercise as follows : 4 sniffs on your inhale, pause for a moment, then 8 sniffs on your exhale.

