

## Diaphragmatic Breathing

The diaphragm is the most efficient muscle of breathing. It is a large, dome-shaped muscle located at the base of the lungs. Your abdominal muscles help move the diaphragm and give you more power to empty your lungs. Diaphragmatic breathing is intended to help you use the diaphragm correctly while breathing to:

- Strengthen the diaphragm
- Decrease the work of breathing by slowing your breathing rate
- Decrease oxygen demand
- Use less effort and energy to breathe

### Diaphragmatic breathing technique



**1.** Lie on your back on a flat surface or in bed, with your knees bent and your head supported. You can use a pillow under your knees to support your legs. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.



**2.** Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out against your hand. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.



**3.** Tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale through pursed lips. The hand on your upper chest must remain as still as possible.

When you first learn the diaphragmatic breathing technique, it may be easier for you to follow the instructions lying down, as shown on the first page. As you gain more practice, you can try the diaphragmatic breathing technique while sitting in a chair, as shown below.

**To perform this exercise while sitting in a chair:**

1. Sit comfortably, with your knees bent and your shoulders, head and neck relaxed.



2. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.

3. Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out against your hand. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.

4. Tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale through pursed lips. The hand on your upper chest must remain as still as possible.

Note: You may notice an increased effort will be needed to use the diaphragm correctly. At first, you'll probably get tired while doing this exercise. But keep at it, because with continued practice, diaphragmatic breathing will become easy and automatic.

**How often should I practice this exercise?**

At first, practice this exercise 5-10 minutes about 3-4 times per day. Gradually increase the amount of time you spend doing this exercise, and perhaps even increase the effort of the exercise by placing a book on your abdomen.

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation



Many studies have shown that relaxing one's muscles markedly reduces anxiety. Over time, people *learn* to be anxious and tense; in the same way, people can teach themselves how to relax. One way of learning how to relax is through Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR).

1. In order to learn to relax, it's important to practice at least 20 minutes a day, every day. Find a regular time (after waking, before bed, before meals) when you're sure not to be distracted. You may want to start with a longer (30 minute) relaxation period. As you get better and better at PMR, it will take less and less time to achieve the relaxation effects.
2. Before beginning relaxation, make sure you are in a quiet place, preferably with dim lighting. You may recline in a chair or lay on a couch or a bed during the relaxation, as long as you are comfortable (and won't fall asleep!). Turn on the fan or the air conditioner, close your eyes, and give yourself permission to shut out all the distractions of the day.
3. Practice relaxation on an empty stomach. Food digestion after meals will tend to disrupt deep relaxation. Wear comfortable clothes and take off shoes, glasses, jewelry, etc.
4. Make a decision not to worry about anything. Give yourself permission to put aside the concerns of the day. Allow taking care of yourself and having peace of mind to take precedence over any of your other worries. (Success with relaxation depends on giving peace of mind high priority in your overall scheme of values.)
5. Assume a detached attitude. Do not *try* to relax. Do not *try* to control your body or your thoughts. If you find your mind wandering, guide yourself gently back to the sensation in your muscles. The point is to allow yourself to let go, not to worry about your performance.
6. Be aware that PMR involves both tensing and relaxing your muscles. During this process, you may experience unusual sensations, such as tingling, warmth, or heaviness in your muscles as they relax. This is a normal process, and is generally a sign of increasing relaxation. However, if you are injured in any part of your body, you may want to avoid tensing that body part, and instead just focus on loosening and relaxing the muscles.
7. When you tense a particular muscle group, do so vigorously for 7-10 seconds. Envision the muscle group tensing, and focus on feeling the buildup of tightness and strain.
8. When you release the muscles, do so abruptly, and then relax, enjoying the sudden feeling of limpness. Allow the relaxation to develop for at least 15-20 seconds.
9. Allow all the other muscles in your body to remain relaxed, as far as possible, while working on a particular muscle group.

This is a skill that takes a while to learn! The first few times you go through PMR, you might not feel very different. However, over time you will find it easier and easier to let go of your tension, and will begin to feel more and more relaxed.

## **PMR SBS**

(Progressive Muscle Relaxation, Step By Step)

Once you are comfortably supported in a quiet place, follow the instructions for each muscle group below (or just listen along to your recording):

- 1) To begin, take three deep abdominal breaths, exhaling slowly each time. As you exhale, imagine that tension throughout your body begins to flow away.
- 2) Clench your **left fist**. Hold for 7-10 seconds, and then release for 15-20 seconds. Repeat with the **right fist**. (Use the same time intervals for all muscle groups.)
- 3) Tighten your **forearms** by straightening your fingers and pointing them at the ceiling, then back towards your body. Hold...and then relax.
- 4) Tighten your **biceps** by drawing your forearms up towards your shoulders and “making a muscle.” Hold...and then relax.
- 5) Shrug your **shoulders** up towards your ears, tightening the muscles. Hold...and then relax.
- 6) Wrinkle up your **forehead** and brow, focusing on the tension in the muscles...and then relax.
- 7) Squeeze your **eyes** shut as tightly as you can, feeling the tension in the muscles around the eyes. Hold...and then relax.
- 8) Clench your **jaw**, hard, flexing the muscles in your jaw and cheek. Hold...and then relax.
- 9) Press your **lips** together tightly, pursing them so the muscles around your mouth tighten...and then allow them to relax.
- 10) Press your head back against the chair or bed, hard, feeling the tension in the **back of your neck**. Hold...and then relax.
- 11) Allow your head to fall forward, as though trying to bury your chin in your chest, and feel the tension in the **front of your neck**. Hold...and then allow your head to fall back, very naturally.
- 12) Arch your back, sticking out your chest, and feel the tension in your **upper back**...and relax.
- 13) Take a deep breath and hold it, feeling the tightness in the muscles around your **chest**. Hold it...and then relax, breathing deeply from the abdomen.
- 14) Tighten the muscles of your **stomach**, making the stomach very hard. Hold...and relax.
- 15) Stretch both of your legs, straight out in front of you, until you can feel the tension in the backs of your **thighs**. Hold...and then relax.
- 16) Tense both **calf** muscles by stretching your feet and pointing your toes up toward your head. Hold...and then relax.



From: Goldfried & Davison, *Clinical Behavior Therapy*