

Just breathe!

You may have been told in the past to “take a few deep breaths” when you were feeling worried or upset about something. On one hand this is helpful to just slow down and cool off. However, altering the speed of our breath actually can slightly change our body’s anxiety response. **Slow diaphragmatic breathing** is a developed technique that involves slowing down the breath to communicate “safety” to the brain.

While we do not recommend that you use breathing techniques to try to eliminate anxiety when you are feeling anxious, it can be a way to get through a tough situation and calm the body some so that we can make a good decision about what to do next. Try the following exercise:



“Slow Diaphragmatic Breathing”

1. Sit comfortably in a chair with your feet on the floor. You can lie down if you wish.
2. Fold your hands on your belly.
3. Breathe in slowly and calmly. Fill up the belly with a *normal* breath. Try not to breathe in too heavily. The hands should move up when you breathe in, as if you are filling up a balloon. Avoid lifting the shoulders as you inhale; rather, breathe into the stomach.
4. Breathe out slowly to the count of “5.” Try to slow down the rate of the exhale. After the exhale, hold for 2-3 seconds before inhaling again.
5. Work to continue to slow down the pace of the breath.
6. Practice this for about 10 minutes.
7. This works best if you practice this two times each day for 10 minutes each time. Try to find a regular time to practice this each day.

Slow Diaphragmatic Breathing Tips:

1. The speed of the breath is more important than the depth of the breath. Avoid trying to “catch” your breath by taking really deep breaths.
2. Don’t use breathing exercises to “get rid of” the anxiety; use the breath to help get you through a tough situation, or practice it daily to “train in” a slower, calmer breathing style over time.
3. Practice! It takes time to learn how to calm the body using the breath.



Take home points:

Slow diaphragmatic breathing is one relaxation skill used in CBT. It is best used as a daily practice, like exercise, or as a way to get through a tough situation without leaving or making things worse. For best results, practice slow breathing twice a day for around 10 minutes each time.