

Relaxed Breathing

When we feel stressed or anxious, our breathing changes. Often, we start to breathe in a ‘shallow’ way – our breaths become smaller, shorter, and faster. This is part of our bodies’ natural ‘fight-or-flight’ response to stressful situations. While this isn’t dangerous, learning to relax your breathing in these moments can help you feel calmer and less overwhelmed.

Relaxed breathing (also known as ‘diaphragmatic breathing’ or ‘deep belly breathing’) means taking slower, deeper, and more relaxed breaths. It’s helpful to learn that you have control of how you breathe, and that you can use it in moments of stress or anxiety.



How could this tool help me?

The *Relaxed Breathing* exercise will help you:

- Calm your body and your mind when you feel anxious or overwhelmed.
- ‘Ground’ yourself if you get lost in upsetting thoughts or feelings, or start to ‘zone out’.
- Feel more relaxed overall, if you practice regularly.



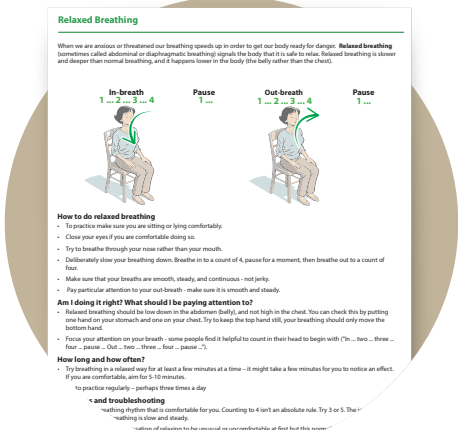
How should I use it?

- Use the instructions on the next page to practice relaxed breathing. It’s best to familiarize yourself with them before you start.
- Practice relaxed breathing regularly and try to build it into your routine.



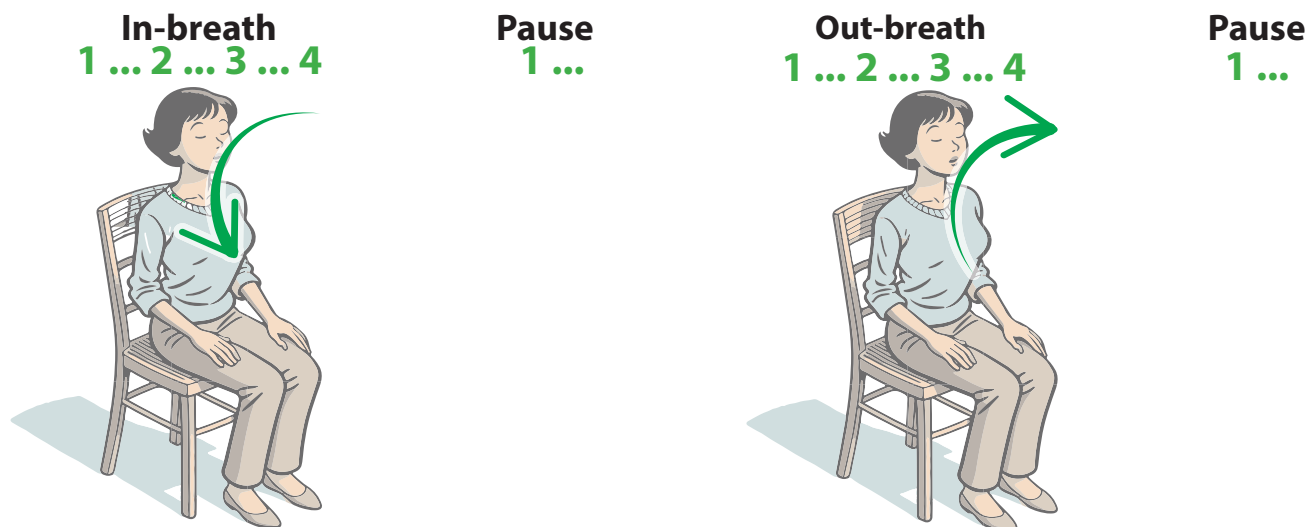
Helpful tips

- Don’t worry about doing relaxed breathing the ‘right’ way. The most important thing is that you breathe in a way that’s slower, deeper, and more relaxing for you.
- Some people find it helpful to add words to their relaxed breathing. For example, you might silently count your breaths (“1... 2...”) or think “calming the body” as you breathe in and “calming the mind” as you breathe out.
- There may be times when thoughts or feelings distract you while you practice. If you lose focus, acknowledge what has happened and bring your attention back to your breathing.
- Relaxation might feel unusual or uncomfortable at first. This normally passes with practice, so keep going.
- If you have respiratory difficulties (e.g., asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), discuss with your therapist or physician before practicing this exercise.



Relaxed Breathing

When we are anxious or threatened our breathing speeds up in order to get our body ready for danger. **Relaxed breathing** (sometimes called abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing) signals the body that it is safe to relax. Relaxed breathing is slower and deeper than normal breathing, and it happens lower in the body (the belly rather than the chest).



How to do relaxed breathing

- To practice make sure you are sitting or lying comfortably.
- Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so.
- Try to breathe through your nose rather than your mouth.
- Deliberately slow your breathing down. Breathe in to a count of 4, pause for a moment, then breathe out to a count of four.
- Make sure that your breaths are smooth, steady, and continuous - not jerky.
- Pay particular attention to your out-breath - make sure it is smooth and steady.

Am I doing it right? What should I be paying attention to?

- Relaxed breathing should be low down in the abdomen (belly), and not high in the chest. You can check this by putting one hand on your stomach and one on your chest. Try to keep the top hand still, your breathing should only move the bottom hand.
- Focus your attention on your breath - some people find it helpful to count in their head to begin with ("In ... two ... three ... four ... pause ... Out ... two ... three ... four ... pause ...").

How long and how often?

- Try breathing in a relaxed way for at least a few minutes at a time – it might take a few minutes for you to notice an effect. If you are comfortable, aim for 5-10 minutes.
- Try to practice regularly – perhaps three times a day

Variations and troubleshooting

- Find a slow breathing rhythm that is comfortable for you. Counting to 4 isn't an absolute rule. Try 3 or 5. The important thing is that the breathing is slow and steady.
- Some people find the sensation of relaxing to be unusual or uncomfortable at first but this normally passes with practice. Do persist and keep practicing.