

## Instructions for Diaphragmatic Breathing

First, take a few moments to check your current level of anxiety or bodily tension. Rate your starting level of anxiety or tension on a 0 to 10 scale (0=totally relaxed, 10=as tense as you have ever felt).

**When you are first learning diaphragmatic breathing, it is helpful to practice when your tension levels are low to moderate rather than really high.** Later on, you will be able to use the skill even during higher levels of tension.

**TIP!** If you have high levels of tension most of the time, pick times when you feel least tense and remember that it is important to practice regularly anyway.

1. At first, practice alone in a quiet room with no distractions. Sit quietly in a comfortable chair, preferably one that supports your back and neck. Have your feet resting comfortably on the floor and do not fold your arms or cross your legs or ankles. Notice any tension in your jaw and shoulders, such as clenched teeth or your shoulders drawn up around your ears. That level of tension can get in the way of effective practice, so let your jaw loosen and let your shoulders release down before you start. Close your eyes or focus them at a point high up on the wall, and let yourself notice your breathing for a few moments. Now start shifting the **pathway** of your breath so you are breathing in **through your** nose and out through your mouth, at your usual pace. It can take a few moments to get comfortable with this pathway – in through the nose and out through the mouth. You may notice that your breathing initially feels a bit awkward or you might even feel a bit anxious when you begin to focus on your breathing. This is quite common – we are not used to paying attention to something that happens all the time. Just remind yourself that this is a normal part of learning a more relaxed way of breathing and that it will get easier and more comfortable with practice.
2. Continue breathing gently in through the nose and out through the mouth. As you breathe in, you may start to notice your abdomen (tummy) expands up and out a little – that is great! It means you are involving your diaphragm muscle. Then as you breathe out you may notice your tummy sinks back down. Breathing in through the nose, tummy expands out; breathing out through the mouth –tummy sinks down – let all the muscles in that area just relax and release.
3. Now that you are getting a sense of the pathway of your breath, you can focus on the **pacing**. The aim is to breathe in just a little deeper than usual, and release all the way out. It can help to count with your breathing – gently in to the count of 1 -2 -3; and releasing your breath all the way out, to the count of 1 – 2- 3 – 4. Breathing in to the count of 3, and out to the count of 4. Continue breathing at this pace for the next few minutes. If that pace is feeling too difficult, adjust the count down a little – breathe in to the count of 2 (1 -2) and out to the count of 3 (1-2-3).

4. Now you can do a brief check of your diaphragmatic breathing. Place one hand lightly on your upper chest and the other hand just above your belly button (in the centre just below your ribs).

Breathe comfortably as you have been doing the last several minutes – in through the nose, out through the mouth – breathing into the count of 2 (or 3) and out to the count of 3 (or 4). Notice how your hands are moving as you breathe. The upper hand on your chest will move a little. If you are breathing from your diaphragm, you will also feel the lower hand move out as you breathe in and move in as you breathe out. Rest your hands gently back on your lap.

**TIP!** Don't worry if it seems hard to coordinate your breathing and the movement of your abdomen at first. Most people, except for opera singers or trumpet players, have difficulty getting at first

5. You can continue breathing in this way a few more minutes. As you breathe in, imagine warm air flowing into your lungs and to all parts of your body. You can try some small adjustments and see if they are helpful for you.
  - For example, breathe in comfortably, and pause for 1-2 seconds, then gently breathe out through your mouth imagining all the tension in your body flowing out as you breathe out.

**TIP!** Relaxed breathing is not the same as deep breathing – use the *pathway* of in through the mouth/out through the nose and the *pacing* of breathing in to the count of 3 and out to the count of 4. .