

RELAXATION Rx.

“Prescription for Keeping Your Breathing on Track”

Here is a great stress relief technique, called ***controlled breathing***, which you will find useful exploring. It is learned easily and is extremely effective for relaxation.

Practice daily for 15 minutes when you are relaxed so it will have some ongoing impact, and you should also do it whenever you need to.

1. Sit comfortably upright.

Sitting upright is better than lying down or slouching, as it increases the capacity of your lungs to fill with air.

2. Control the rate of your breathing.

Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth in a steady rhythm. You may find it helpful to count ‘*one, two, three*’ as you breathe in, and ‘*one, two, three*’ as you breathe out.

3. Use your diaphragm (lower chest muscle) to breathe.

Your diaphragm is the big muscle under the lungs. It pulls the lungs downwards which expands the airways to allow air to flow in. When we become breathless we forget to use this muscle and use the muscles at the top of the chest and shoulders instead. Each breath is more shallow if you use these upper chest muscles. So, you tend to breathe faster and feel more breathless if you use your upper chest muscles rather than your diaphragm.

You can check if you are using your diaphragm by feeling just below your breastbone (sternum) at the top of your abdomen. If you give a little cough, you can feel the diaphragm push out there. If you hold your hand there you will feel it move in and out as you breathe.

4. Relax your shoulders and upper chest muscles when you breathe.

It is best to take the weight off your shoulders by supporting your arms on the side-arms of a chair or your lap. Gentle massage of your shoulders by a trusted person may help you relax. They stand behind your chair and gently rub your shoulders and encourage you to relax.

5. Relax your mind too.

Anxiety can make breathing problems worse. So, distract your mind when you are short of breath. For example, shut your eyes and concentrate on pleasant, peaceful thoughts. Some people find it easier to distract their mind by listening to quiet music.

If persistent anxiety is a problem which you think is making your breathing worse, see your GP or a clinical/counselling specialist. They will be able to advise on relaxation exercises, courses or other useful approaches.