



Deep Belly Breathing

You can reduce stress levels in your body and improve your body's overall functioning by practicing proper breathing techniques. There are essentially two types of breathing: chest breathing and deep belly breathing.

What is Chest Breathing?

- Chest breathing is the drawing of minimal breath into the lungs where air enters into the chest area using the intercostal muscles rather than throughout the lungs via the diaphragm.
- When your chest and lungs expand, the expansion is usually restricted by tension and tightness in the muscles around the abdomen and ribs. This causes the chest to expand mainly upward, with less airflow and more rapid respiration.
- Chest breathing activates our sympathetic nervous system, affecting our adrenal glands, cortisol levels, and hormonal balance, which can increase our stress levels and affect our overall health.

What is Deep Belly Breathing?

- Deep belly breathing (also referred to as diaphragmatic breathing) is where every deep breath goes straight to the lungs and fills the body with oxygen.
- When your diaphragm contracts, your lungs expand. When you breathe from your abdomen, your belly will expand and move out with each inhalation. Your chest will rise slightly, but not nearly as much as with chest breathing since your abdomen is doing most of the work.
- Deep belly breathing activates your vagus nerve and lowers stress responses in your body. The vagus nerve is the nerve that comes from the brain and controls the parasympathetic nervous system, which controls your relaxation response. The relaxation response is necessary for your body to heal, repair, and renew as it reduces stress, anxiety, and inflammation.

(See Reverse Side)

How do I practice Deep Belly Breathing?

1. **Position yourself in a comfortable way.** Sit comfortably with your knees bent and your shoulders, head, and neck relaxed. Or, lie down on your back on a flat surface (feel free to bend your knees and support your head if needed).
2. **Place one hand on your belly just below your rib cage.** This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.
3. **Inhale through your nose for a count of four.** Breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of four so that your stomach moves out against your hand. Feel the stretch of your belly to the point that your abdominal muscles begin to tremor.
4. **Exhale slowly out through your mouth for a count of eight.** When you exhale, part your lips slightly and push the air out of your mouth. You will feel your belly fall as you do this.
5. **Pause for a moment after exhaling your breath and then take in another breath when you feel ready.** You can repeat the above pattern for up to five minutes. You may get tired from this exercise, but you will find that the strengthened diaphragm muscle allows for increased oxygen intake and energy. With continued practice, deep belly breathing will become easier and more automatic.

When do I practice Deep Belly Breathing?

- You can use the deep belly breathing practice anytime during the day. It may be helpful whenever anything upsetting happens, when you notice tension in your body, when you experience mild to moderate anxiety, or when you are experiencing food cravings.
- You can use this practice before bedtime to help you fall asleep.
- You can practice this exercise 5-10 minutes about 3-4 times per day.