

## **Breathing Retraining Exercises**

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Print out these instructions to assist you while learning to do abdominal breathing based on these simple exercises.

While laying on a flat surface, place both hands on your stomach. I won't you to experience muscular control of your abdominal muscles and diaphragm.

With both hands on your stomach, gently push in your stomach and hold the pressure.

Without worrying about your method of breathing, simply use your abdominal muscles to push your hands up by pushing your stomach out. That's it - your abdominal wall muscles. While not the same as your diaphragm, by engaging those muscles you can coordinate with the expansion of your diaphragm.

Relax your muscles and your stomach should fall. Now, the same thing, push in with your hands to create some pressure, now push out your stomach and your hands should rise.

Next, I want you to connect the movement with your breathing. Again, press your hands against your stomach but this time WHEN you push your stomach out, breath in (inhale) through your nose. It should have the sensation like you are pulling air into your stomach. When you do this, hold it for just a moment. Then exhale through your mouth and your stomach and falls should fall.

Even though this will seem pronounced, it is learning the pattern of breathing called diaphragmatic breathing. Do this in a pronounced fashion: hands on your stomach, push your stomach out, pull your air in behind it, fill up your "stomach" with air, then exhale through your mouth and your hands/stomach falls.

When you feel you have the method under your control, then check it by using this test. Gently place one hand on your chest and the other hand on your stomach. Now, breath and the hand on your stomach should move first and should move up. The hand on your chest will not move or only slightly at the end of the breath. This will be your method of knowing that you have the correct breathing

technique. If you don't, repeat the previous instructions. If you do, then move to the next step.

While still laying down, with a heavy book on its side, lay the book on your stomach. I want you to learn to breath in a normal relaxed fashion but with the same diaphragmatic manner. When you inhale the book should rise, when you exhale the book should fall. The key to this part is that it is your normal breathing rate. Once you can lay there and breath normally but in a diaphragmatic manner, then go to the next step.

Let's do the same type of breathing but now while sitting up. I recommend using a straight back chair to practice. I also suggest first using a hand on your chest and one on your stomach. This way you can be more aware of which part of your body is moving first. Your stomach should move first. When you first practice while sitting up I suggest doing the pronounced breathing with full inhalation through your nose and then exhalation through your mouth. Then move to the normal rate of breathing with inhalation and exhalation both through your nose.

You may find yourself during times of stress as having tightened up and along with it your breathing. In such instances you will find that you have returned to shallow chest breathing. Now, you can recognize how to return to diaphragmatic breathing which then helps your body relax and thus lowers your tension.

These exercises may seem simple but don't underestimate how powerful it is to be able to use your breath to manage your anxiety.