

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing is a style of breathing which (if done well) can slow down your heart rate and rate of breathing. It has been shown to lower your overall level of physiological arousal, and to calm your thinking, making it easier to think clearly in difficult situations.

This breathing technique is also a simple but effective way to improve your overall resiliency to stress. It is useful to learn and practice regularly, so as to be able to calm your reaction to stressful situations in a controlled and deliberate manner.

The basic technique is as follows;

Find a calm and quiet place to sit or stand without being interrupted. Place your hand flat over your lower abdomen, over your navel area.

Consciously take a deep breath in, slowly counting to 4 (or 6 if you can). While you do this, make sure that your hand (over your navel region) is being pushed outwards with the downward expansion of your diaphragm. Your chest area should also expand outwards. Be careful that your shoulders are not rising or falling while you breathe in or out.

Once you have finished breathing in slowly, then breathe out in the same slow, controlled manner, counting slowly to 4 (or 6), and making sure that the hand over your navel is drawn in towards your spine again by the movement of your diaphragm as you breath. Once you are more comfortable with this technique, you may wish to pause slightly between each breath in, and out, and count to 2 – 4.

NB. If you become dizzy make sure to stop the exercise, your breathing should return to normal quickly if you distract yourself. Dizziness could be a sign that you are hyperventilating, which is not possible to do if you are breathing using your diaphragm, please reread the instructions, or consult with a professional if you need further help.

Notice the speed of your heart rate and breathing. Has there been a change?

It's best if you practice this exercise regularly, for at least a minute, particularly before situations that are likely to be stressful, or when feeling overwhelmed.