

Belly Breathing

Why learn to Belly Breathe? When people are anxious, they tend to take rapid, shallow breaths that come directly from the chest. Shallow Breathing contributes to anxiety symptoms!

Chest breathing causes an upset in the oxygen and carbon dioxide levels in the body resulting in increased heart rate, dizziness, muscle tension, and other physical sensations. You may interpret this as a worsening of your anxiety symptoms. If your blood isn't properly oxygenated, this may signal a stress response that contributes to anxiety and panic attacks.

Diaphragmatic or belly breathing, on the other hand, stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which is part of the nervous system responsible for regulating heartbeat, blood flow, breathing, and digestion. Belly breathing helps you to avoid the "fight-or-flight" response (acute stress response) to mentally or physically stressful situations.

Chest vs. Abdominal/Belly Breathing

Most people aren't really conscious of the way they're breathing, but generally, there are two types of breathing patterns:

Diaphragmatic (abdominal/belly) breathing: This type of breathing is a type of deep, even breathing that engages your diaphragm, allowing your lungs to expand and creating negative pressure that drives air in through the nose and mouth, filling your lungs with air.

Thoracic (chest) breathing: This type of breathing comes from the chest and involves short, rapid breaths. When you're anxious, you might not even be aware that you're breathing this way. It can strain your upper chest and neck muscles. It can lead to muscle aching.

The easiest way to determine your breathing pattern is to put one hand on your upper abdomen near the waist and the other in the middle of your chest. As you breathe, notice which hand raises the most.

Learning how to Belly Breathe

- Lie on your back with your knees bent. You can use a pillow under your head and your knees for support if that's more comfortable.
- Place one hand on your upper chest and the other on your belly, just below your rib cage.
- Exhale with your abdominal muscles and your belly button should be pulling in toward your spine.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose, letting the air in deeply, towards your lower belly. The hand on your chest should remain still, while the one on your belly should rise.
- Tighten your abdominal muscles and let them fall inward as you exhale through pursed lips. The hand on your belly should move down to its original position.
- For best results inhale for a count of 2-3 seconds, and exhale for 4-6 seconds.
- Repeat this cycle for a minimum of 5 minutes or until you feel more relaxed.