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Breathing and Relaxation Techniques for Stress Relief

Take a deep breath in. Now let it out. You may notice a difference on how you feel already. Deep breathing counters the effects of stress by slowing the heart rate and lowering blood pressure. Your breath is a powerful tool to ease stress, it may make you feel less anxious and possibly relaxed. Some simple breathing exercises along with some simple relaxation exercises, can make a big difference if you make them part of your regular routine. But don't force it, forcing it can make you feel more stressed!

Deep Breathing:

Short shallow breathes that stop at your chest, can make you feel anxious and zap your energy. With deep breathing, you will learn how to take bigger breaths, all the way into your belly.

1. Get comfortable. You can lie on your back in bed or on the floor with a pillow under your head and knees. Or, you can sit in a chair with your shoulders, head, and neck supported against the back of the chair.
2. Breathe in through your nose. Let your belly fill with air.
3. Breathe out through your nose.
4. Place one hand on your belly and the other hand on your chest.
5. As you breathe in, feel your belly rise. As you breathe out, feel your belly lower. The hand on your belly should move more than the hand on your chest!
6. Take two or three more full, deep breaths. Breathe fully into your belly as it rises and falls with your breath.

Breath Focus:

While you do deep breathing, put a picture in your mind with a word or phrase to help you feel more relaxed. This example suggests breathing in "peace and calm" and breathing out "stress and tension."

1. Close your eyes.
2. Take a few big, deep breaths.
3. Breathe in. As you do that, imagine that the air is filled with a sense of "peace and calm." Try to feel it throughout your body.
4. Breathe out. As you are doing it, imagine that the air leaves with your "stress and tension."

5. Now use a word or phrase as you breathe. For example, as you breathe in you may say in your mind "I breathe in calm and peace." As you breathe out, you may say in your mind "I breathe out stress and tension."
6. Continue this for 5 minutes, building up to 10 and eventually 20 minutes!

Equal Time for Breathing In and Breathing Out:

1. Sit comfortably on the floor or on a chair.
2. Breathe in through your nose and as you do it, count to five.
3. Breathe out through your nose to the count of five.
4. Repeat several times.

Laugh Out Loud:

A good belly laugh doesn't just lighten the load mentally. It lowers cortisol, your body's stress hormone, and boosts brain chemicals called endorphins which help your mood. A laugh a day keeps the doctor away!

Tune In to Your Body:

1. Mentally scan your body to get a sense of how stress affects it each day. Lie on your back or sit with your feet on the floor.
2. Start with your toes and work your way up to your scalp, focusing on each body part and noticing how each feels. Simply be aware of places you feel tight or loose without trying to change anything.
3. For 1 to 2 minutes, imagine each deep breath flowing to that body part.
4. Repeat the process as you move your focus up your body, paying close attention to sensations you feel in each body part.

Meditate:

A few minutes of practice each day can help ease anxiety. "Research suggests that daily meditation may alter the brain's neural pathways, making you more resilient to stress," says psychologist Robbie Maller Hartman, PhD, a Chicago health and wellness coach.

1. Sit up straight, eyes closed, with a hand on your belly.
2. Slowly inhale through your nose, feeling the breath start in your abdomen and work its way to the top of your head.
3. Reverse the process as you exhale through your mouth.

Reference: WebMD.com