

Diaphragmatic Breathing Technique (Wehrenberg)

This technique can be done anywhere, anytime. Whether you are tense at work or home, in public or alone, you can breathe without being obvious. When you are at home practicing this technique, you may be more comfortable lying down as you do it.

1. Lie down flat on your back or stand in a relaxed manner with your feet slightly apart and your knees loose. You must have a straight passage for air to flow. If you are seated, make sure you are sitting straight and that your head is upright, not hanging forward or tilted back against a couch cushion.
2. Rest your hand on your abdomen. This will help you to notice if you are breathing deeply enough and whether your chest is tight. One way to imagine this is to think about how a balloon fills with water when you attach it to a faucet. The bottom fills and widens first and then the water expands the upper portion. This image of heaviness as you fill is something to hold in mind as you imagine your breath. From an image of your breath filling your abdomen, feeling heavy and warm. This will help your body to relax and fill your lungs completely. If you have trouble feeling this, raise your arms and clasp your hands behind your neck. It will help you breathe more fully.
3. Next, blow out all the air in your lungs until you feel empty.
4. Then, begin to breathe in. Inhaling must be done evenly, as you can fill your lungs from bottom to top in equal, even amounts. Breathing evenly is easier when you find a pace that works to measure your breathing in and out. Count your breathing until you feel exactly full (e.g. a slow 1,2,3,4) to help you get a measured, even breath. It will probably take 3-6 counts to fill your lungs. If you do not like the idea of counting, breathe while thinking a sentence with an even rhythm, such as, "I notice I am breathing in. I notice that I am breathing out."
5. Fill up evenly, with no gulps or gasps, so the top is reached physically (as in the image of the balloon) just in time to release the breath at the same even, measured pace.
6. Exhale evenly. Count the breath out of your body, with no sudden release time to exchange the oxygen and carbon dioxide, and inhaling too rapidly can make you dizzy.
7. Exhale longer than you inhale. If you get dizzy breathing in and out at the same pace, exhale for 2 counts longer than it took you to inhale or pause for 2 counts at the end of the breath.
8. Practice! This kind of breathing will calm you down during a panic attack. Most people who panic immediately forget their panic control measures unless they have practiced them. It is essential to use diaphragmatic breathing the moment you sense a panic attack beginning, so you must practice frequently, whether or not you are sensing panic at the moment.

How to Practice Breathing

Most breathing and relaxation books suggest 10 minutes of breathing practice per day, but that might seem like a monumental task. It is better to start with a

manageable goal and build up to the longer period of breathing, which will set the stage for deep relaxation.

For 7 days, practice this breathing for 1-2 minutes at a time, up to 10 times a day. Decide to practice whenever you are: Stopped at a stoplight

- On hold on the phone
- Brushing your teeth
- Watching the commercial breaks during a television show
- In line at a store
- Waiting for a friend at work or school
- In the car to pick up someone
- Waiting for the computer to boot
- Waiting for the teacher to hand out the test papers
- Waiting for a meeting to start
- Waiting.....

On the eighth day, pick one time of day when you can predict that you will be uninterrupted for a few minutes. Early in the morning, late evening, or lunchtime work best for most people. During this one uninterrupted period per day you are going to *add one minute of breathing per day*. You can have music on during this time....preferably classical or new age music, which is specifically composed to enhance brainwaves for relaxation. For the second 7 days, you will continue the 1-2 minute practices seven to nine times a day, but you will add one minute each day to the time you picked when you can be uninterrupted. By the end of the week, you may be breathing diaphragmatically during this time for 7-8 minutes. This period of time is the foundation for profound tension release, meditation, and cueing of the relaxation that helps the stress response turn off.

The more you practice the diaphragmatic breathing technique, the more you will notice about your breathing. This technique is simple to do, but not necessarily easy to master. For breathing to effectively reduce tension, you first have to remember to use it! Until it becomes a habit, you may forget to breathe under anxiety or tension. It takes time, practice, and attention for this process to feel smooth, easy, and natural. It's like any other skill, after a while it will become automatic.

You can use diaphragmatic breathing for panic attacks right away. You will immediately notice a reduction in the length of the panic attack. Over a period of a few weeks, if you successfully diminish the impact of the panic attacks, you will see a decrease in frequency of panic. Stopping panic in its tracks calm the basal ganglia and causes it to trigger panic less often.