

Following are my recommendations for proper deep breathing techniques, based on research and personal experiences over the past fifteen years:

- **GOOD POSTURE** - Make sure to have good posture; sitting in a chair with a straight back or lying down can make it easier to maintain good posture.
- **ABDOMINAL BREATHING** - The goal of abdominal breathing is to pull air deep into the bottom of your lungs so that your stomach pushes out, and then you fill the top half of your lungs with air, which maximizes air intake. To help with this, place a palm over your belly button and the other hand over your chest. Breathe out until you can feel your hand pressing inward, then breathe in and extend your abdomen and watch your hand move outward, which allows you to get full lungs of air, which is the way babies breathe. Adults typically do shallow top-half-lung breathing. Abdominal breathing is not easy for everyone to do, but like everything else in life, you need to practice to get better/good at it.
- **FIND YOUR RIGHT RHYTHM.** Good posture and abdominal breathing are necessary, yet the proper rhythm of breathing in and out is what's most critical. The general rule I recommend is to breathe in for a count of 3 seconds and breathe out for 7 seconds, both of which can feel like a long time under the circumstances. Numerous sources recommend 6 breaths per minute, which does equal 6 reps of 3-second inhalations coupled with 7-second exhalations. For me, I need to pause 2 seconds between both inhalation and exhalation and exhale for 10 seconds because my heart rate is 50 beats per minute (average is 60-100 beats per minute), otherwise, the pace is too fast for me. If you don't have a rhythm that suits you, none of the other aspects of deep breathing will be nearly as effective. Practice finding the rhythm that works best for you, but do so when you are calm. I cannot stress this last aspect enough since trying to incorporate and properly use a new nuanced coping skill when your anxiety is "crushing you" won't be as effective as it could be, or won't be effective at all, or could actually be counter-productive as you might get frustrated and feel like a failure. So play around with different rhythms and find what works best for you; I have had a couple of patients who have said 4-8 works for them. Generally, if you are feeling dizzy at all, in all likelihood, you are breathing too fast. There are a wide variety of deep breathing styles with varying rhythms:
 - 4-4-4 is breath in 4 seconds/hold for 4 seconds/breath out for 4 seconds

- 4-7-8 is breath in 4 seconds/hold for 7 seconds/breath out for 8 seconds
- Other types of deep breathing include Rolling Breath and Morning Breathing (Healthwise staff), as well as Pursed-Lip Breathing, Diaphragmatic Breathing, Breath Focus Technique, Lion's Breath, Alternate Nostril Breathing, Equal Breathing, Resonant Breathing, Sitali Breath, Humming Bee Breath (Leavitt), and Sudarshan Kriya Yoga. There are even more versions for specific health issues like Breathing Exercises with COPD (Leavitt).
- MOUTH OR NOSE. While it is commonly promoted to breathe in exclusively through your nose and out of your mouth, I prefer patients breathe out through their nose as well, otherwise, they tend to reflexively exhale way too quickly.

Now that I have covered the breathing aspects, I will now focus on additional options:

- CLOSE YOUR EYES - It is preferred, but not necessary, to close your eyes and focus on the breath going in and out of your body, as doing so cuts out visual stimuli and helps increase focus/effectiveness. I find lying on a mat in a dark room quite calming.
- MAINTAIN FOCUS - External stimuli will compete for your attention such as a dog barking, a car driving by, or a neighbor's TV. We don't want to fight these distractions by thinking, "That blasted TV is ruining my deep breathing!" Instead, we want to gently recognize it, "There's a TV; let me refocus on the breath going in and out of my body."
- MANTRAS CAN HELP. Thinking "Good air in, bad air out," "Calming air in, stress out," or any other phrase along these lines to incorporate more specific focus.
- PRACTICE ACCEPTANCE. Acceptance is crucial to properly deal with any situation. The following phrases can be very helpful:
 - "I'm anxious. I've been anxious before and I survived."
 - "As long as I don't feed into my anxiety it will pass sooner than later."
 - "This state of mind is just a phase; I can't stay in the same emotional state forever."

The last phrase can be particularly useful because it is a fact that nobody can stay in the same emotional state forever. Develop phrases that work best for you, practice saying them out loud and internally, write them down on a piece of paper or in your cell phone, record them in your cell phone and play them back to yourself, or find an app that works for you. If you record

something yourself, make sure you are talking slow and soft enough, I also like to some timber to my recordings. Technology is an amazing tool in these ways.

- **VISUALIZING.** One form of visualizing is to imagine stress leaving our bodies throughout the top of our heads like white smoke gently billowing out of a chimney. Another would be to recall a pleasant memory, although some people prefer not to use this since their minds tend to recall negative experiences from the past. Fantasizing about a dream vacation can work better than thinking of the past; for me, it's being with my family on a sailboat in New Zealand.
- **MASSAGE.** My favorite technique is self-massage. People hold stress in various parts of the body, which can affect us in many ways such as upset stomach, headache, TMJ and knotted muscles. Muscle tension can contribute to people being on edge, which, in turn, can result in being more prone to stress, anger or anxiety. People tend to hold a majority of their stress from the shoulders up. Massaging these areas gets more blood flow to that part of the body, relieves tension, and is usually very relaxing physically and mentally. For shoulders and trapezius muscles, it's best to massage them one at a time; otherwise, you are engaging the muscles we are trying to massage, and that won't work very well. For neck muscles, I find cupping the base of the skull with the pinky-side of your palm up and massaging the muscles all with one hand works better than using two hands simultaneously because this arrangement allows the neck muscles to relax better. Jaw muscles, forehead, base of the back of the skull, and skull can take a good amount of pressure. Most of my patients, especially those who noted deep breathing didn't work for them, are surprised by how well this particular technique works.