

Breathing Exercises

These simple exercises are useful if you suffer from panic attacks, anxiety, nerves or simply wish to calm yourself and focus your mind. Try to get to know your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations *before* an attack happens and then use the exercise you prefer when you feel an attack coming on.



Many people having panic attacks think they can't breathe in, but actually are not breathing out properly. This can add to their panic as they struggle to breathe in again and again before letting their breathe out fully. Try repeatedly breathing in, and you will see how alarming this can feel!

7/11 Breathing

For many people, this simple exercise is a life line back to calmness.

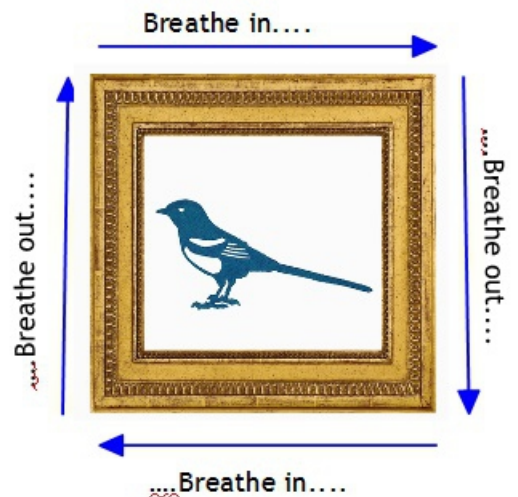
Practice everyday for best results, so you are familiar with the technique should you start to feel anxious.

- Breathe in through your nose for 7 counts
- Breathe out through your mouth for 11 counts
- Repeat, focussing on your breath; the sensations of it as it passes in and out of your body

If you feel 7 to 11 counts is too much, try shorter periods such as 6/10 or 5/9. Just make sure you breathe out more than you breathe in.

Picture Frame Breathing

Choose a square picture or shape, such as a paving slab or window. Sit on your seat bones or stand evenly on both feet before it, making sure you can see the whole thing without moving your head. With your eyes only, follow the edge of the shape, breathing in on one side, and out as you turn the corner and follow the next side. Go at a pace that suits you, and focus on your breath.



Why not try combining Picture Frame Breathing with 7/11? Use a rectangular picture, and count 7 along the short side and 11 along the long side to regulate your breathing.

Deep Down Breathing

When you feel you are breathing normally, check *how* you breathe. Put a hand on your chest and one on your tummy. See which one moves the most when you breathe in. Most of us breathe in a shallow manner into our chests which can increase our stress



levels. If you practise breathing into your diaphragm you will strengthen your muscles, build confidence in your breathing and reduce anxiety.

With a hand on your tummy, breathe in as if you were filling your belly full of air. Your hand should rise as it is pushed up by your tummy. Don't take in a lot of air, just take in a normal breath and pull it right deep down into your belly. Use your diaphragm to help pull it down. Breathe out slowly and repeat.



Deep down breathing whilst lying on your back? Place a light book, toy or small pillow on your belly and breath deeply until you can see it when you look down. Some people find this easiest to do with their knees bent.

What else can you do?

Join a choir!

Singing in a group is a wonderful experience, and will help you learn to breathe in a regulated, controlled way. This can help build your confidence and strengthen your muscles.



Swim!

Ever felt like you were half drowning when doing the front crawl? Learning to time your breathing when doing front crawl or breast stroke is a great way to get to know your body, increase your stamina and learn to rely on your breathing. A good way to learn to breathe whilst doing the front crawl is to use a pull buoy. This is a float you place between your legs so you can concentrate on your arms only. Breathe out under water through your nose, and breathe in through your mouth as you lift your head above water. Go slowly, until you get the hang of it.



Practise

Make sure you practise these exercises, not simply try them next time you have a panic attack or anxious moment. With a little practise you will find they can have an enormous impact on your stress and anxiety levels.



When trying anything new to manage your anxiety, make a note of your level of anxiety on a scale on 1-10 before and after, 1 being very low and 10 being the worst it has ever felt. Note the exercises that lower the level, and recognise your achievements when they happen.

Before 1 ⇨ 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10
After 1 ⇨ 2 3 **4** 5 6 7 8 9 10

