

Diaphragmatic Breathing for a Sense of Calm

How do you breathe? Are you breathing fully to support calm?

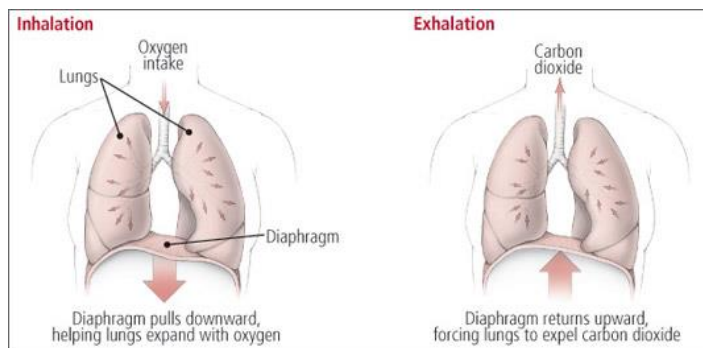
- Place one hand below the rib cage and one hand on your chest.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Notice the movement of your hands when you inhale. Which hand moves more?

Chest Breathing or Shallow Breathing

- Short, shallow breaths primarily use the chest and the upper lobes of the lungs.
- When feeling afraid, stressed, anxious, or tense, people often utilize this type of breathing.

Diaphragmatic breathing (belly breathing, relaxed breathing)

- A deep, full breath allows both the upper and lower lungs to fill with oxygen, moving the diaphragm downward and pushing the stomach out, to make room for all the air. Visualize how babies breathe, typically you see the entire stomach and diaphragm moving in and out.
- The diaphragm is a shelf of muscles that separate the thoracic cavity (lungs and heart) from the abdominal cavity (stomach, etc.).
- A deep, full breath allows both the upper and lower lungs to fill with oxygen, moving the diaphragm downward and pushing the stomach out, to make room for all the air.
- This type of breathing increases the oxygen that enters the body, reducing tension and nourishing tissues. When you breathe out fully, you also help to release all the tension in the body.
- When intentionally done, this type of breathing can slow your breathing rate, eliciting a feeling of relaxation and jump-starting the parasympathetic response, which has the opposite effect of the sympathetic nervous system (stress response) in the body.



This exercise harnesses the power of breath to trigger a physiological response that reduces tension and fosters a sense of calm by activating the autonomic nervous system. Think of the sympathetic response as the gas pedal and the parasympathetic response as the brake, with stress activation typically associated with sympathetic response.

By practicing diaphragmatic breathing, you can enhance the parasympathetic response, promoting tension and anxiety reduction and relaxation. The Vagus nerve runs through the diaphragm and is an integral component of the parasympathetic nervous system.

Diaphragmatic breathing plays a pivotal role in supporting the physiology of the “rest and relax” response within our nervous system.

To Practice:

- This technique can be practiced lying down or when seated, and in almost any setting.
- You should practice for 2-5 minutes each day or as often as needed to create calm until it feels natural and comforting when tense, anxious, etc.
- You can count to four or five (Breathe in 1... 2...3...4) and slowly breathe out to the count of four or five or
- Other options: Come up with a phrase to say to yourself, Breathe in and imagine the oxygen going all the way down into my stomach which can help you pace yourself and ensure you take slow breaths. If you are more tactile notice where you feel your breath as you breathe in and out – nose, chest, or belly. You can also add noticing your feet on the floor, colors or objects in the room to bring in an element of grounding.

-