

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing (also known as belly breathing or deep breathing) is a way of taking deep, relaxing breaths by contracting the diaphragm – the large muscle at the base of the abdomen (belly). This type of deep breathing is characterised by the expansion of the abdomen rather than the chest when breathing. Conscious diaphragmatic breathing takes our attention away from our thoughts and re-focuses attention on to the body. Diaphragmatic breathing has many reported benefits:

- Relieves muscle tension
- Slows heart rate
- Lowers blood pressure
- Calms and centres
- Increases oxygen supply to all cells

This is how it's done:

1. Get in a comfortable position – You can do this standing up, although you may get greater benefit if you're sitting or lying down (on your back). If you lie down you can put pillows under your head and knees for greater comfort
2. Place one hand on your upper chest and one on your tummy (at the base of your breastbone)
3. Breathe in slowly through your nose – allowing your stomach to move out. Imagine that your lungs are filling with fresh air. The hand on your tummy should move outwards gently and the hand on your chest should not move or only move very slightly. You can count to three on the in breath
4. Breathe out slowly through pursed lips – feel your stomach move in (then pause for a moment). You can also count to three on the outbreath

To lengthen the breath naturally you can also try blocking one nostril as you breathe in and then breath out through pursed lips. Practice this technique for 10 – 15 minutes, three or four times a day until it becomes automatic (if it isn't already). If you begin to feel dizzy then relax and breathe normally.