

Belly Breathing Meditation

Background: Research has shown that deep belly breathing and engagement of the diaphragm can assist in disengaging from a fight/flight response, encourages engagement of the parasympathetic nervous system, releases tension or stress commonly held in the abdominal area; can be used during a panic attack.

Practice:

- Sit quietly in a chair with both feet on the ground and your hands in your lap. Allow yourself to feel centered in the chair.
- Bring all of your attention to the physical act of breathing.
- Place one hand just above your belly button and the other on your chest, right over your breastbone. You can use your hands as a simple biofeedback device. Your hands will tell you what part of your body, and what muscles, you are using to breathe.
- Start the breath by exhaling while also pressing your belly muscles including the diaphragm towards your spine, while allowing the exhale to come out of your nose, which may feel like a sigh.
- Then gently inhale through your nose and repeat pressing your belly towards the spine while exhaling. Do this a few more times using the hand below the beltline to guide you; when you feel ready, contract your belly muscles to press against your back with every exhale without the use of the hand.
- Continue to breathe by expanding the belly/diaphragm with each inhale and contracting the belly with each exhale, all the while keeping connected to your breath.
- If your heartbeat still seems elevated OR your upper body is not relaxed at this point, you can double your exhale for many breath cycles.
- On your next exhale, contract the belly/diaphragm towards the spine and count how long it takes to press out the last few drops of breath...remember that number.
- For the next inhale, make it half as long as the exhale. Example: if you counted to 4 while pressing out your last drop of breath during the exhale, then count to 2 for the inhale; if you counted to 6 while exhaling, then inhale for 3 counts.
- Repeat the double exhale sequence until you start to feel your upper body muscles are relaxed or less tense, which signals it is time to return to a rhythmic and balanced inhale and exhale through the belly.

Awareness:

- You will start to notice that each time you breathe in, your diaphragm or stomach will expand... and each time you breathe out your diaphragm or stomach will relax. Again, don't try to do anything - just be aware of the physical sensations of breathing in and breathing out.
- Be open to feeling your shoulders relax or to spontaneous yawning; if either (or both) of these actions happen, that is good news as they are signs that you are engaging with your parasympathetic nervous system.
- It is totally normal to be distracted by thoughts while doing any type of meditation. When you are aware your attention has moved away from your breath and to your thoughts, gently acknowledge the thoughts and then return to awareness of your breath.