

# Controlled Breathing



## Principle

Many people become anxious or upset and, without realizing it, start to breathe quickly. When this occurs, their breath is no longer coming from their diaphragm but from their chest, which means that less oxygen is coming into their lungs and that less oxygen is being circulated throughout their body and brain. This condition activates the sympathetic nervous system to respond to what the stress responses of flight, fright or freeze perceive to be a crisis. The body is equipped to counter the damaging effects of stress on its systems by activating the parasympathetic nervous system via conscious breathing that is slow and deep.

## Technique

1. Sit on a straight-backed chair with your feet resting on the floor. If your legs are too short, then place a pillow under your feet so that they remain flat. Do not cross your legs or arms, or you will cut off the flow of breath.
2. As you inhale, feel your abdomen press out. As you exhale, watch your abdomen draw inward.
3. Inhale through your nose, watching your abdomen expand. You may want to place a hand on your abdomen to feel the movement. Pay attention to the breath as it enters your nostrils slightly cool and becomes warmer during your exhalation. As you take this deep, slow breath, imagine a balloon in your abdomen expanding with air. Count slowly from one to four.
4. Hold your breath for a count of four.
5. Exhale through your mouth as though you were blowing out through a straw for a count of eight.
6. Do this for several minutes. Notice how your body relaxes more deeply and your mind becomes clearer as you continue. To accentuate the correct starting point of the inhalation in your diaphragm, you may lie down or place a hand on your abdomen to track its movement along with your breath.

## Resources:

### Websites

#### [University of Minnesota](#)

Visit this link for a deep breathing exercise and explore the site for other self-care and stress management strategies.

### Books

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Wherever You Go, There You Are*. Hyperion, New York, NY.

## Videos

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZbQPk8LeJ8>

A 6-minute video featuring two stress-relief breathing techniques -- the “3-part breath” and the “ocean-sounding breath.”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C639ArXu1iw>

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A 10-minute video that features beginning yoga for stretch and strength on a relaxing beach setting.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tu-qZugHXfc>

An 8-minute meditation with Bridget Woods Kramer, a leading Anusara yoga teacher.