

Tip sheet: Deep Breathing

It may sound surprising, but most people do not breathe properly. Natural breathing involves your diaphragm, a large muscle in your abdomen. When you breathe in, your belly should expand. When you breathe out, your belly should fall. Over time, people forget how to breathe this way and instead use their chest and shoulders. This causes short and shallow breaths, which can increase stress and anxiety. Fortunately, it is never too late to “re-learn” how to breathe and help protect yourself from stress. Practice the simple exercise below to improve your breathing.

How to breathe deeply:

1. Find a comfortable position either lying on your back or sitting. If you are sitting down, make sure that you keep your back straight and release the tension in your shoulders. Let them drop.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest.
4. Take a few breaths as you normally would. Does your belly rise and fall with every inbreath and outbreath? If you can answer “yes,” that is good. This is the natural way of breathing. If your belly stays still but your chest rises and falls with every breath, practice breathing deeply and slowly by only allowing your belly to rise and fall as you slowly breathe in and out.
5. Continue to take deep breaths, concentrating on only moving your belly.
6. Continue as long as you would like!

How can I relax?

1. It can take some time to re-learn how to breathe. The more you practice, the easier it becomes. Take a few minutes each day to practice this exercise. You can do it anywhere.
2. Try to practice this exercise at a time when you are already relaxed. This will make it easier to take deeper breaths.
3. If you are having trouble taking deep breaths, try breathing in through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. Slowly count to five in your head as you breathe in and out.

Find more information at www.1in5.info