

Belly Breathing for Anxiety

Many people tend to be chest breathers. When they inhale their chest rises upwards. This is also the breath people use when they are anxious. One of the most obvious signs that someone is anxious, are short, sharp and shallow chest breaths, which are most easily seen by watching the collarbones.

However we weren't always chest breathers. When we were born we started off as belly breathers. People tend to switch to chest breathing as they grow up.

The foundation of meditative practices such as yoga is belly breathing. Belly breathing is deeper and slower than chest breathing, and it can exert a powerful calming influence on the body, which is why it is often used to help people with anxiety.

Belly breathing is relatively simple and effective, and can be learnt with a little practice. When you first try this technique do it from a seated position. Belly movements are more obvious when we are sat down, which makes it easier to learn.

- 1) Place one hand on your belly over your belly button, and the other on your chest. This will help you get the technique right.**
- 2) Start by exhaling through your mouth.**
- 3) As you inhale through your nose focus on expanding your belly, while keeping your chest still.**
- 4) Exhale slowly through your mouth, while focussing on pushing the air out by shrinking your belly.**
- 5) Cycle from step 3) to step 4)**



If you find that you become dizzy while practicing this technique, you can control this by making the exhale slower and longer than the inhale. Start with a 4 count on the inhale, and an 8 count on the exhale, moving onto a 12 or a 16 count if you feel comfortable.

Also by making the exhale longer and slower than the inhale, you will naturally start the next inhale by inflating your belly.

Once you are practiced and comfortable using this technique you will find that you no longer need to use your hands as a guide, and can instead rely on the feeling of your belly against your clothes, which means you can use it without drawing attention to yourself.

It is important when using this technique, that you don't reverse belly breathe, because this will tend to increase anxiety. Shrinking the belly on the inhale will force you to increase chest breathing, which will make feelings of anxiety worse.