

Calm Down Using Diaphragmatic Breathing

One of the main symptoms associated with anxiety (and panic) is breathing too fast. The effort to get oxygen-rich blood to our major muscles quickly can lead to hyperventilation, in which the oxygen-carbon dioxide balance in our bloodstream becomes disrupted.

When we are breathing too fast (hyperventilating) it can feel as if there is not enough oxygen (which makes us more panicky) however, the reverse is true – we actually have too much oxygen. For although Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) is a waste gas that we breathe out, we need a certain amount of it in our bloodstream to be able to use up the oxygen we have. When we hyperventilate we end up with an excess of oxygen that we cannot actually use. Hence it can feel like we don't have enough oxygen.

In order to calm down we need to slow our body down, and one way that we can actually do this is by slowing down our breathing. Here, we can positively influence our nervous system by the physical action we take. By learning to breathe more slowly and deeply from the diaphragm (the muscular wall separating the lungs from the stomach) we can redress the oxygen-CO₂ balance in the body and promote a feeling of calmness.

The Method:-

1. Take a slow deep breath in through your nose for a slow count of four (imagine the air filling your stomach, not lungs, and feel it expand).
2. Hold for a slow count of four.
3. Breathe out through your mouth for a slow count of four (imagine your stomach pushing the air out).
4. Hold for a slow count of four.
5. Repeat 3 or 4 times, no more.

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