

# DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

## WHAT IS DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING?

- A technique that helps you slow down your breathing when feeling stressed or anxious.

## WHY IS DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING IMPORTANT?

- Our breathing changes when we feel anxious. We tend to take short, quick, shallow breaths, or even hyperventilate—this is called “overbreathing”.
- It is a good idea to learn techniques for managing “overbreathing” because it can actually make you feel even more anxious (due to a racing heart, dizziness, or headaches).

**KEY POINT:** Like other anxiety-management skills, the purpose of calm breathing is not to avoid anxiety at all costs, but just to take the edge off or help you “ride out” the feelings.

## HOW DO I DO IT?

Calm breathing involves taking smooth, slow, and regular breaths. Sitting upright is usually better than lying down or slouching, because it can increase the capacity of your lungs to fill with air. It is best to 'take the weight' off your shoulders by supporting your arms on the side-arms of a chair, or on your lap.

1. Close your eyes and place your hands on your diaphragm. Your diaphragm should slowly move while you breathe in and out, rather than your chest.
2. Take a slow breath in through the nose, breathing into your lower belly (for about 4 seconds)
3. Hold your breath for 4 seconds
4. Exhale slowly through the mouth for 6 seconds
5. Wait 2 seconds before taking another breath

About 6-8 breathing cycles per minute is helpful to decrease anxiety, but find your own comfortable breathing rhythm. These cycles regulate the amount of oxygen you take in so you do not experience the fainting, tingling, and giddy sensations that are sometimes associated with overbreathing.

## RULES OF PRACTICE:

- Try calm breathing for at least five minutes twice a day.
- You do not need to be feeling anxious to practice – in fact, at first you should practice while feeling relatively calm. You need to be comfortable breathing this way when feeling calm, before you can feel comfortable doing it when anxious. You’ll gradually master this skill and feel the benefits!
- Once you are comfortable with this technique, you can start using it in situations that cause anxiety.

Adapted from: [www.anxietybc.com/sites/default/files/CalmBreathing.pdf](http://www.anxietybc.com/sites/default/files/CalmBreathing.pdf)

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*Want to learn more and get support developing your own stress management plan? You can meet with an Academic Skills Tutor for free! For assistance, email [thinktank@email.arizona.edu](mailto:thinktank@email.arizona.edu) or call the THINK TANK front desk at 520-626-0530.*

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