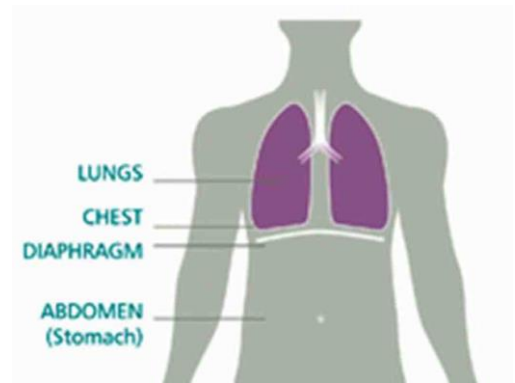


Physical Relaxation: Diaphragmatic Breathing

Research has shown that there is a strong relationship between feelings of anxiety and fast, shallow breathing. On the other hand, it is difficult to remain physically tense while breathing deeply, slowly, and regularly. You can use a method of breathing called diaphragmatic breathing, to relax quickly in stressful situations. The diaphragm is a muscle which separates the abdomen (stomach) from the chest. When the diaphragm is used during breathing, there is maximum flow of air into and out of the lungs.

First, you need to prepare yourself for practising diaphragmatic breathing. Choose a suitable place and time of day, so that you are less likely to be disturbed or interrupted. Loosen any tight items of clothing so that your stomach and chest can move freely. Sit on a comfortable armchair or lie down on a comfortable surface. Get yourself in a comfortable position, uncross your legs and let your muscles unwind. Before you start the diaphragmatic breathing sit or lie quietly for a few minutes and observe the pattern and rate of your breathing.



Then start:

1. Place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest.
2. Breathe in slowly through the nose so that the hand on your stomach rises gently as your stomach moves out. Do not push your stomach out; let it rise gently, as you take in a breath. Your chest should stay relaxed and move little.
3. Then breathe out slowly through the mouth so that the hand on your stomach falls as your stomach moves down. Again, your chest should stay relaxed and move very little while you are breathing out. As you breathe out feel your shoulders and the back of your neck loosening and sinking lower and lower as the air leaves your body. Imagine that each breath is washing tension out of your muscles. Say the word 'relax' to yourself, each time you breathe out. If you find steps 2 and 3 difficult at first, sit or stand in front of a mirror and practise.
4. Once you have learned steps 2 and 3, you need to learn to breathe slowly, to develop the pattern of deep and slow breathing that is characteristic of relaxed states. To do this, add a slight pause each time after breathing in and a longer pause after breathing out. Alternatively, count to 3 in your head while breathing in, and to 4 while breathing out. Either method will help you slow down your breathing and deepen your relaxation.

Try not to hold or force your breaths during diaphragmatic breathing. At first, when you are learning this new pattern of breathing, it may appear rather artificial and difficult. With practice you will be able to achieve a natural, regular and comfortable rhythm of deep and slow diaphragmatic breathing. The first few times that you practise diaphragmatic breathing, if you feel lightheaded or dizzy, it

means that you are breathing too deeply and too quickly. one way to get rid of the dizziness is to breathe into a paper bag for a short time. It may sound silly but it works.

Once you have mastered diaphragmatic breathing the next step of course is actually using it in stressful situations. Develop ways of reminding yourself to use diaphragmatic breathing. For example, if you tighten up and your dystonia seems to get worse when you are late or in a hurry, put a dot on your watch and each time you glance at your watch and see the dot, practice diaphragmatic breathing, Diaphragmatic breathing is a particularly practical method of relaxation, because once you have learned it. You can use it in any situation (walking, driving, at work, at home, in social situations) to relax quickly without others noticing.

Quick Mental Relaxation: Pleasant Mental Imagery

By practicing diaphragmatic breathing, you will learn to quickly relax your body, To achieve total relaxation, you need to be mentally as well as physically relaxed, Using pleasant mental imagery (picturing scenes in your 'mind's eye') is a quick way of getting mentally relaxed. Pleasant imagery is relaxing, because while you are totally absorbed in a positive mental image, you will stop worrying and thinking negative thoughts. You can carry out this imagery exercise after you have achieved a comfortable and regular rhythm of deep and slow breathing.

Close your eyes and clear your mind, Think of a relaxing, pleasant and enjoyable scene, This may be a scene that you remember (for example, an enjoyable day out on the beach or in the country) or it may be a scene of your own creation, experiment with a few images to find out which you find most relaxing, Once you have decided on the particular relaxing scene try to get a clear and vivid image of it in your head. See and feel everything that is part of the scene as if it was happening now. In doing this, remember that you have five senses.

First try to picture the scene in detail in your mind's eye. Picture it as clearly as you can, try to focus on one or two things in the scene. Then let your mind go back, to picturing the whole scene. Now try to concentrate for a while on any physical or bodily feelings associated with the scene, There may be feelings of warmth and relaxation, Concentrate on these feelings and try to make them as real as possible, now think of any smells or scents that may be associated with the scene. For example, the smell of freshly cut grass in the country or the smell of the sea on the beach, Think of any tastes that you may associate with this relaxing scene and if there are any, try to remember and imagine them. Finally, think of all the sounds that are associated with this scene. For example, the relaxing sound of the waves of the shore, or the gentle whistle of a breeze on the shore.

To become proficient at quickly relaxing yourself physically and mentally, practice diaphragmatic breathing and pleasant mental imagery at least twice a day. Once you have mastered these skills, you can start using them in stressful situations.