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Basic Rhythmic Breathing

Rhythmic Breathing, often called relaxation or belly breathing is one of the best strategies available to manage worry and anxiety, to improve sleep, and to feel calm and relaxed.

*Basic Rhythmic Breathing

As you inhale, think of the air as a source of vital energy: the word “inspire” means to “take in air”. Your stomach will move outward as you take in air, then your chest will expand – or perhaps these will expand in reverse order. What is important is for the air you inhale to fill up your chest and stomach, and, if possible, push down on your diaphragm. Rest your hands on your belly button so you can feel your stomach moving as you inhale and exhale. You will also notice that your collarbones move upwards as you breathe more and more deeply. There is no need to push, insist, or force your breathing. Just notice.

After you have been breathing for a while, you might try this:

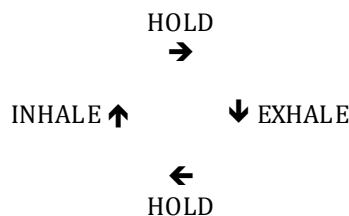
Inhale: Count one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two (2 seconds) as you breathe into your stomach and chest comfortably.

Hold your breath: Count one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two (maximum of 2 seconds) Holding after the inhale is especially useful to counter the effects of hyperventilation, or when you feel faint or fatigued, or when you feel stomach cramps. Holding your breath even for one second will begin to put your heart variability into greater coherence, hence will reduce anxiety. Experiment with this pause: be careful not to cause muscle pain, and do not hold your breath for so long that you begin to feel anxious as a result. Be especially cautious if you have ever damaged the stomach muscles.

Exhale: Exhale slowly, to a maximum of one-thousand-three (3 seconds). Place your hands on your chest and stomach so you can feel the muscle movements and become aware of your normal breathing.

Hold your breath after the exhale; maximum one second. *Stop this exercise if you feel faint, or increasingly anxious.*

Repeat for several minutes provided you can do so without pain, lightheadedness, or other disagreeable reaction. Note that we have been following four steps:



*John Hartung, PsyD,