

Exercises for Stress

STEP1

Learning to control your breathing (Diaphragmatic breathing)

- Find a quiet place where you can stand, sit or lie down for about 15-20 minutes each day, and especially for the next week or so until you are accustomed to the exercise. It is best to lie down and make yourself comfortable.
- When you are at ease and breathing normally, clear your mind and think only about your breathing. How often are you breathing? How deeply are you breathing? Do not try to relax, just breathe through your nose and think about your breathing.
- Think as you breathe - BREATHE IN – BREATHE OUT. Don't think about anything else. Let all your other thoughts float by. Feel your muscles relax as you breathe in deeply.
- Think only about breathing in. Take a deep breath and hold it. As you hold your breath, feel the tension it gives you in your body. Breathe out and repeat this twice.
- Concentrate now on breathing out. Tense the muscles and breathe out hard. As you breathe out, feel your body sinking and getting heavier and heavier. Don't fight this feeling, just go with it.
- Keep on breathing, making each breath last as long as you feel comfortable with. As you breathe in imagine a big pink balloon getting bigger and bigger. As you breathe out watch it getting smaller while you begin to feel heavier and heavier.
- Continue with this exercise until you feel completely relaxed. Breathing exercise will help to clear the lungs, refresh your breathing system and strengthen your stomach muscles and lungs.

STEP2

Rhythmic breathing

- This exercise creates a balance between your breaths in and out. This might be disturbed when you get tense or anxious.
- Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down.
- Breathe in with a measured count. For example, count to four while breathing in, and then count to four while you are breathing out. Repeat this several times. You can change your count from four to five or six for a change.
- Think about how you feel as you focus on your breathing. Can you feel a deep sense of being relaxed. Just let go of everything else and think about the breath and the count.

STEP3

Ratio breathing

- This exercise encourages you to control how alert or awake you feel by using a ratio to breathe to. This technique helps you to focus and concentrate properly.
- When you breathe in count to four (1) and when you breathe out count to eight (2). This should produce a feeling of relaxation that will calm you down if you are feeling stressed.
- If you are feeling too tired, and want to wake up and be more alert, then change the ratio from 1:2 to 2:1 and focus on breathing in.
- At first you may be focussing only on the counting. You will soon get used to these breathing patterns, and they will become automatic.

“Courage is not the absence of fear – it’s doing what it takes in spite of the fear”

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STEP4

Breath control at competition

- Now that you are comfortable controlling your breathing in a relaxed situation you should now take the next step and practice this process at a competition. You will certainly need to use the controlled breathing techniques prior to your race or main training sets.
- Once you have warmed up or immediately before your race, think about your breathing patterns. Are they too fast and shallow, or deep and slow?
- While waiting for your race, and particularly when you are standing behind the starting block, take a couple of fairly deep breaths focussing on breathing out. Say to yourself “relax”. Sometimes sighing while you breathe out helps you to relax.
- If you feel too relaxed, or sleepy, then take a few quick forceful breaths to energize yourself.
- The more efficient you become at breathing techniques, the more quickly you will be able to relax.

STEP5

Muscle relaxation

This is a very good way of taking tension out of your muscles.

- Find yourself a comfortable place, with no distractions.
- Lie on the floor and make yourself comfortable.
- Close your eyes.
- Work your way down the exercises on the list below, first tensing the muscle and then relaxing it. When you tense the muscle, feel the tightness that you can create. Hold the muscle tight and explore the feelings it creates. Now relax. As you relax, say to yourself “relax”, or “let go”.
- Feel the muscle get heavy and feel like you are sinking into the floor.
- At the end of the exercise, just enjoy lying on the floor in this super relaxed state.
- Let any thoughts you have escape, and just enjoy your own space.
- Now think about yourself as a person and a swimmer. Be proud of what you are. After a few minutes, open your eyes and come awake. You should feel totally relaxed!

Forehead and scalp	Wrinkle forehead
Face	Grit teeth
Tongue	Press tongue against roof of mouth
Lips	Purse your lips
Jaws	Clench your jaws together
Neck	Raise shoulders and lower head slightly
Shoulders	Raise shoulders and press arms against body
Arms (upper)	Make a fist and flex the biceps
Forearms	Make fist and bend hand up at wrist
Hands and fingers	Make fist
Chest	Take a deep breath & tighten chest muscles
Stomach	Squeeze stomach muscles and press into spine
Up and down spine and back	Move shoulders back and tighten along spine
Waist and buttocks	Squeeze buttocks together and press into floor
Thighs	Bend knees slightly and squeeze muscles
Calves	Bend knees and point toes
Feet and toes	Curl toes down and then up

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