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Breathing Exercises

Practice these initial exercises to control tension. They may, or may not, be enough. Try each one 3 times a day for a week. As with most things, doing something just one or two times will not produce much noticeable change. You will probably feel most comfortable with one of the three exercises. Pick a quiet spot each day. Concentrate on the exercise and shut out any distractions. Get into a comfortable position before starting any exercise.

EXERCISE #1: 1 TO 8 Count

Take a deep, slow breath and close your eyes. Exhale fully and completely, making sure to get the last bit of air out of your lungs. Breathe in again. As you inhale, imagine the number **1** in your mind; at the same time, focus on the inhalation. Hold your breath for three seconds. Exhale, and as you breathe out the air fully and completely, mentally say **2** and visualize the number two in your mind. Breathe in again and mentally say **3** focusing on the three and on the inhalation. Hold your breath for three seconds. Exhale fully and completely, while mentally visualizing and saying **4**. Inhale, saying **5**, exhale saying **6**. Remember to visualize the number and focus on the inhalation. Inhale, counting **7** and exhale counting **8**. Repeat the entire sequence from **1** to **8**. Slowly open your eyes.

Do you feel calmer?

Did you have any difficulty visualizing the numbers?

Were you able to focus in the inhalation?

Did you finish the exercise?

If you had any trouble on the inhalation or visualizing the numbers, clear your mind of any distractions and try again. You might have been trying too hard if you didn't finish the exercise.

This exercise is not a race. Learn to be patient with yourself and the exercise. Breathe slowly and pause between breaths. Do not try to force relaxation— this will only make it harder for you to relax and you may find this very frustrating. Instead, find a way to give into relaxation.

EXERCISE #2: Three-Part Breathing

Take a deep breath. Imagine that your lungs are divided into three parts. Visualize the lowest part of your lungs filling with air. Use only your diaphragm; your chest should remain relatively still. Imagine the middle part of your lungs filling, and as you visualize the expansion, allow your rib cage to move slightly forward. Visualize the upper part filling with air and your lungs becoming completely full. Your shoulders will rise slightly and move backwards. Exhale fully and completely. As you empty your upper lungs, drop your shoulders slightly. Visualize the air leaving the middle portion of your lungs, and feel your rib cage contract. Pull in your abdomen to force out the last bit of air from the bottom of your lungs.

-Repeat this exercise four times.

-Did you have any trouble visualizing your lungs expanding and contracting?

-Were you able to complete the inhaling visualization before you started to exhale?

If you had trouble visualizing, take a moment to clear your mind of thoughts. You can get back to them later when you are calm and relaxed. The visualization may seem more complex to you than it actually is. If you found yourself exhaling while still visualizing the inhalation, try to inhale more slowly. Be sure to exhale completely and push all of the carbon dioxide out of your lungs. This allows more room for life-giving oxygen to fill your lungs when you inhale.

EXERCISE #3: Alternate Nostril Breathing

Once you are comfortable with **THREE PART BREATHING** try this more advanced exercise.

Place your right forefinger over your right nostril, pressing lightly to close off the nostril. Take a deep, full breath, inhaling with your left nostril. Visualize your lungs filling fully and expanding completely. Remove your finger from the right nostril and lightly closed off the left nostril. Exhale slowly through the open right nostril. Be certain to exhale fully and completely.

Begin the sequence again by inhaling fully and completely through the left nostril.

-Repeat slowly and rhythmically for ten more breaths.

-Did you find it difficult to breath through your nose?

-Did you find one nostril easier to breathe through than the other?

If you repeat this exercise at different times during the day, you will find that sometimes it is easier to breath through the right nostril, and sometimes the left. This happens because your primary breathing nostril actually changes about every four hours. The exercise will make you more aware of the changes in your breathing patterns.