



Mindful Breathing

Mindful breathing (also called “roll breathing” or “belly breathing”) helps you relax by gaining control of some vital, basic physical functions - respiration rate and heart rate. These functions tend to play off each other in “feedback” loops.

- Anxiety often is fueled and amplified by the tendency of the anxious person to breathe shallow, rapid breaths (hyperventilating), which reduces oxygen content in the bloodstream.
- Our nervous system will sense even subtle reductions in the oxygen content and send a message to the heart; the heart commonly responds to the “feedback” of lower oxygen content by beating more rapidly to get what oxygen there is in the bloodstream to body tissues more effectively.
- The anxious person will often perceive the increased heart rate and shortness of breath with even greater alarm: a “vicious cycle” of progressively rising anxiety can result.

We can run this loop the other way by voluntarily breathing slow, full, deep breaths. Fuller, more oxygen-rich breaths will feed back to the heart to beat more slowly, as there is less need to compensate less-than-optimal oxygen intake.

First: hand on abdomen, hand on chest

- Inhale slowly through your nose, filling your lungs on a slow count to two. Fill your lower lungs first (which pushes your diaphragm down and your abdomen out (hence the name “belly breathing”) and continuing to inhale into your upper chest.
- Hold the full breath for a count of two.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth on a count of four - in other words, around twice as slowly as your inhalation.
- Rest at the “bottom” of your breath. Visualize the tension leaving your body as you exhale and gain control of your respiration.

Repeat the cycle of slow inhalation, hold, and even slower exhalation four times (or more, if you feel like it).