

## Part 5 – Breathing Techniques

**‘Breathing is the greatest pleasure in life....’**

Giovanni Papini



### Why do we need to breathe?

Breathing is a necessity of life that usually occurs without much thought. Proper breathing is an antidote to stress.

When you breathe in air, blood cells receive oxygen and release carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is a waste product that's carried back through your body and exhaled.

When we are worried or panicky, we breathe much faster and shallower to get more oxygen into the body. This is okay in the short term but can upset the oxygen/carbon dioxide exchange and contribute to greater anxiety and fatigue.

Thus, learning and practicing breathing techniques is one of the simplest and most effective ways of supporting our well-being, improving lung function (great for sport and singing!) and can also help in the management of chronic pain.

Set aside a small amount of time each day to pay attention to your breathing. Wear loose, comfortable clothing and find a quiet place when first practicing.

If during any of the exercises you feel lightheaded or dizzy, just stop practicing for a moment and breath normally until the symptoms pass.

### Breathing Deeply (Abdominal Breathing)

Taking deep breaths will help you to feel more in control of your body. It can feel strange at first, but with practice you will start to notice the benefits of deep breathing.



As babies we all start out breathing diaphragmatically. The diaphragm is a thin dome of muscle separating the chest cavity from the abdominal cavity. As the diaphragm expands, air enters the lungs and as it contracts, air is forced out. If you watch an infant, you will notice their stomachs move with each breath. However, as we get into adulthood many of us become chest breathers. This may be because we are often taught to keep our bellies flat; through our posture; or stress may increase tension in the abdominal area, not allowing the diaphragm to contract

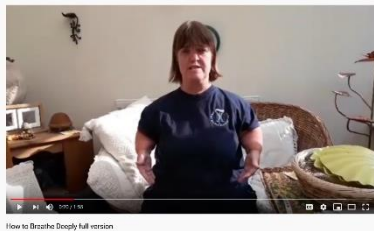
completely or the abdominal wall to move out when taking an in breath. As a result, only the chest expands and the breath is not as deep. When an insufficient amount of air reaches your lungs, your blood is not fully oxygenated. This can hamper digestion and contribute to anxiety and fatigue. Stressful situations may be harder to cope with. In abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing there is extra space for the lungs to fill resulting in a fuller and more complete breath.

### How do you breathe deeply?

- If you are able, lie on your back on the floor, settee or bed and slightly bend your knees. If this is difficult, sit up straight in a chair.
- Put one hand palm down on your belly and your other hand palm down on your chest.
- Take a breath in through your nose. When you breathe through your nose the bristly hairs in your nostrils filter out impurities which are expelled on the next exhalation.
- As you breathe in notice which hand rises the most.
- For deep breathing we need to try and breathe down into the belly so the hand on the belly rises.



If the hand on the chest rises more than the belly, we are taking shallow breaths in and not making good use of the lower part of our lungs. So, with shallow breathing, to get the same amount of oxygen into the body we breathe more rapidly. Rapid breathing can signal to the body we are feeling a bit panicky.



***So, it follows to counteract panic the best technique is to breathe slowly and deeply.***

A video demonstrating the Deep Breathing technique can be viewed [HERE](#)

To practice abdominal breathing:

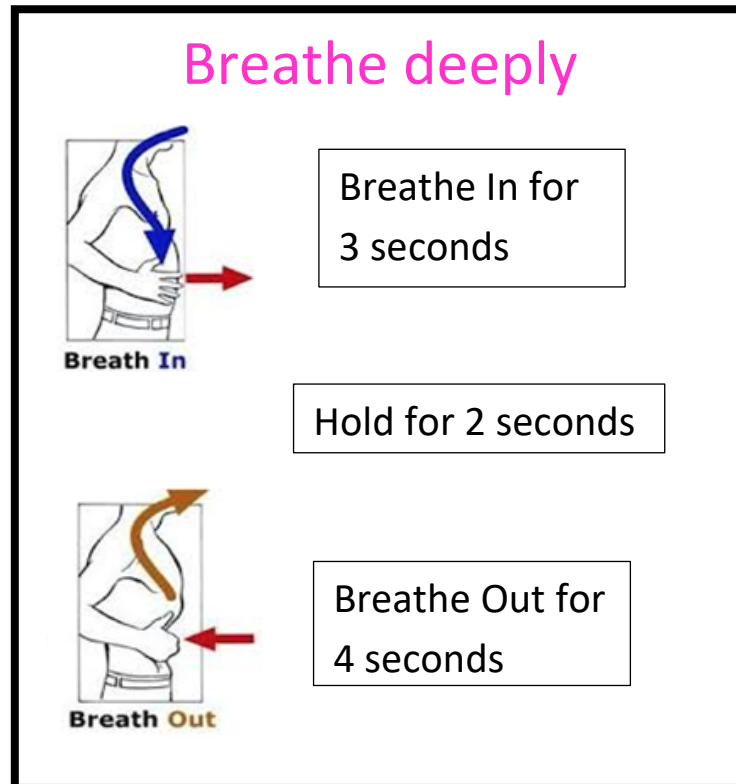
- Sit in a chair and clasp your hands behind your head.
- Point your elbows out to the side. This helps to lock your chest so you can feel the movement in your abdomen.
- Breathe normally, in through the nose and out.
- Find a comfortable place to either lie or sit.
- If you are able, place your hands on your belly.
- Close your eyes and imagine a balloon inside your abdomen.
- Each time you breathe in, imagine the balloon filling with air.
- Each time you breathe out imagine the balloon collapsing.



Similarly, you may also imagine a lotus flower in your belly. As you breathe in imagine the flower opening. As you breathe out imagine it closing.

Here are a few Breathing Exercises you can try:

Exercise 1:



Exercise 2:

- Take a few minutes to notice your breath.
- Notice the inhale and exhale.
- Notice the rise and fall of your belly.
- Notice how the air feels coming in and out.

Exercise 3:

- Take a breath in.
- Breathe all the air out through your mouth until you feel you must take a deep breath in.
- Hold the breath and then repeat.

4. Breath Focusing:

- Make a tight fist and notice what happens to your breathing.

Did you find that you held your breath or breathed in shallow spurts?

- Relax the fist
- Make a tight fist again, but this time continue to breathe normally.

What happens to the tension in your fist? You should find it is reduced and difficult to maintain without a real effort.

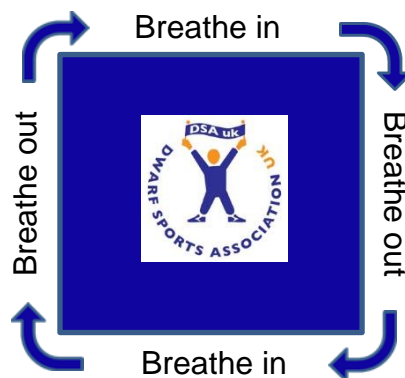
5. Rhythmic Breathing:

- Put on some slow relaxing music.
- Close your eyes and listen to the beat.
- Take a breath in for 3-5 beats of the music.
- Hold your breath for 3-5 beats then breathe out slowly for 3-5 beats.
- Repeat, pairing your breathing with the music.

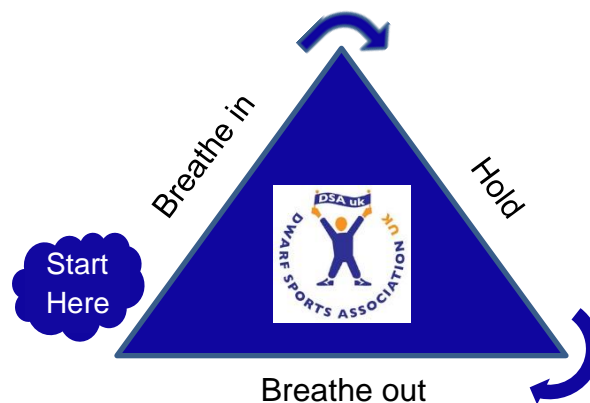
6. 'Shapes' Breathing:

Start breathing in for one second and follow the instructions around the shape. Then see if you can gradually increase the number of seconds, up to 5, for each side of the shape as you work round it.

*Square Breathing:*



*Triangle Breathing:*



### 7. Pursed Lip Breathing

This breathing technique helps you slow down your pace of breathing by applying deliberate effort in each breath.

- Sit or stand in a comfortable position
- Relax your neck and shoulders
- Inhale slowly through your nose for two counts
- Purse your lips as though you were going to whistle.
- Exhale slowly by blowing air through your pursed lips for a count of 4.



### 8. Purifying Breath

This is similar to the pursed lip breathing and can help to stimulate and refresh your body.

- Sit or stand in a good posture.
- Inhale a complete natural breath.
- Hold this breath for a few seconds.
- Purse your lips as though you were blowing through a straw.
- Exhale a little of the air with force through this small hole in your lips.
- Stop exhaling for a moment then blow out a bit more air.
- Repeat until all the air is exhaled in small, forceful puffs.



A video demonstrating the Purifying Breath technique can be viewed [HERE](#)

### 9. Tension releasing breathing

During the day you probably catch yourself sighing or yawning. This may be a sign that you are not getting enough oxygen. Your body tries to remedy this through sighing or yawning. Sighs release a bit of tension and can be practiced at will to support relaxation.

- Sit or lie in a comfortable place.
- Breathe in through your nose.
- As you exhale let out a loud deep sigh.
- As you breathe in imagine the air brings waves of calm throughout your body.
- As you breathe out say a word to yourself that reminds you of relaxation such as 'calm, sunshine, peace.'

## 10. The Windmill

This exercise is particularly good if you are home schooling or working from home and have been bent over a desk or computer.



- Stand up straight with your arms out in front of you.
- Inhale and hold a complete natural breath.
- If comfortable swing your arms backward in a circle several times and then reverse directions. Try rotating them alternately like a windmill.
- Exhale forcefully through your mouth.
- Repeat as often as you like.

## 11. 'Nostril Breathing'

This is a breathing practice for relaxation and has been found to help tension and headaches.

- Sit in a comfortable position
- Rest the index and second finger of your right hand on your forehead.
- Breathe in deeply and evenly through both nostrils.
- Use your right thumb to block off your right nostril.
- Inhale slowly and soundlessly through your left nostril.
- Close your left nostril with your ring finger and simultaneously remove your right thumb to open your right nostril.
- Exhale slowly and soundlessly as thoroughly as possible through your right nostril.
- Inhale through your right nostril.
- Close your right nostril with your thumb and open your left nostril.
- Exhale through your left nostril.
- Inhale through your left nostril.
- Repeat several times gradually raising the number of cycles.



A video demonstrating the Nostril Breathing technique can be viewed [HERE](#)



## Dwarf Sports Association UK Mental Health and Wellbeing



Whilst breathing exercises can be learned in a matter of minutes and benefits experienced, it is useful to have a daily program with exercises you find most beneficial.

Have a look online for some other breathing exercises you can try. You will like some exercises more than others, so find your favourites and practice those about 4 times a day for 3-4 minutes.

'When life's a bit down .... just breathe'



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