

Tip Sheet:

The Relaxation Response and Techniques in Times of Stress



When you're under stress, your muscles tense and your breathing becomes shallow and rapid. One of the simplest ways to stop this stress response and to counteract its effect is to breathe deeply and slowly. It sounds simple and it is!

How Breathing Works

Most people breathe from the chest – this is shallow breathing. Less oxygen is taken in with each breath and the blood is forced to move through the body system quickly to allow enough oxygen to get to the brain and organs. This results in higher blood pressure.

Deep breathing can reverse these effects. Take some time each day to practice this kind of breathing, especially during periods when you're under stress.

Effects of Deep Breathing

By helping you let go of tension, deep breathing can relieve headaches, backaches, stomach aches and sleeplessness associated with the stress response. It releases the body's own painkillers (endorphins) allowing the blood pressure to return to normal.

Deep breathing can also release held-in emotions to come to the surface, so your emotional health benefits too. Use deep breathing anytime, anywhere to reduce/relieve stress.

Basic Components

- Find a quiet place with few distractions
- Maintain a passive attitude – ignore distractions
- Find comfortable position, sit/lie to relax

3-5-7 One Minute Breathing

Anywhere, anytime, at work, at home, traveling to and from, standing up, sitting down you can do this exercise. All you have to do is focus on your breathing for one minute.

Start by breathing in *slowly* as you count to 3. Hold that breath for a count of 5. Breathe out *slowly* over a count of 7 letting the air flow back into the atmosphere. If your mind wanders, notice the thoughts but let them be and refocus on your breathing; notice your breath work its way up and out of your body .

Mindfulness Exercises

There are numerous Mindfulness exercises available on the web. Google 'mindfulness' and find one that appeals to you, then practice it every day until it becomes part of your daily routine.

Benefits of Mindfulness:

- Recognise, slow down or stop habitual reactions
- Respond more effectively to complex or difficult situations
- See situations more clearly
- Become more creative
- Achieve balance and resilience at work and at home
- Deepen or strengthen relationships with others at home and at work

If you're feeling 'stuck' in your situation and you need some help to make progress, contact your on-site support person or call Vitae to make an appointment to speak with a counsellor.