



## **BREATHING EXERCISES**

Focusing on your breathing can be a very effective way of tolerating feelings of distress. If there's an ongoing problem and you can fix it, then that is recommended. However there are many times in our lives when we are faced with situations which we have no control over, or which we cannot change. Instead of engaging in self-destructive behaviours in order to cope (such as restricting intake or overexercising), we can learn to tolerate the distress.

One of the ways in which we can tolerate our distress is by focusing on our breath. Focusing on the most basic requirement of human survival, and re-connecting with our bodies, can help to calm the emotion-centre of our brains. You may wish to try each of these breathing exercises, and see which ones work best for you. Remember to direct your focus on to your breath, and clear your mind of all other thoughts when using these techniques. You will want to practice these methods regularly before they will be effective when you are in an intensely distressing state.

### **OBSERVING YOUR BREATH**

#### **1. COUNTING YOUR BREATH**

Sit comfortably on the floor in cross-legged position, or sit on a chair with your feet flat on the ground, or lie on your back on the floor, or take a walk. As you inhale, think to yourself "I am inhaling, one." Draw in a deep breath as you do this, breathe in from the stomach. You are creating an awareness of the connection between your body and your mind. When you exhale, think to yourself "I am exhaling, one." When beginning the second inhalation, think to yourself "I am inhaling, two." And slowly exhaling "I am exhaling, two." Continue breathing in this way until you reach a count of ten. When you reach ten, return to one. When you lose count, return to one. Keep breathing like this until you feel you can carry on without engaging in self-destructive behaviour.

#### **2. COMPLETE DEEP BREATHING AND IMAGINATION**

Lying down, place your hands on your solar plexus (across your lower ribs) and practice complete deep breathing for several minutes. Imagine that with each incoming breath, energy is rushing into your lungs and being immediately stored in your solar plexus. As you exhale, imagine that this energy is flowing to all parts of your body. Practice daily for at least five to ten minutes. You can also use this exercise to imagine sending energy to a place in your body where there is pain, moving one hand from your solar plexus to the place on your body that hurts.

### **3. BREATH-COUNTING MEDITATION**

Take several deep breaths, focusing your attention on each part of the process (inhale, the point at which you stop inhaling and begin exhaling, exhaling, and before breathing again). Pay attention to the pause and use that time to notice any sensations in your body. Now count your breaths, counting one for the inhale and two for the exhale. If you lose count, simply start over again. Note any thoughts that intrude, but just let them float away. Always bring your focus back to your breathing.

### **4. DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING**

Place one hand on your abdomen right beneath your rib cage. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose into the bottom of your lung and send the air as low as you can (your hand should actually rise). When you have taken a full breath, pause for a moment and then exhale slowly through your nose or your mouth, depending on your preference. Be sure to exhale fully. As you exhale, allow your whole body to “let go.” Do ten slow abdominal breaths. Try to keep your breathing smooth and regular.

### **5. BREATHING AWARENESS**

Lie down on the floor with your legs flat or bent at the knees, your arms at your sides, your palms up, and your eyes closed. Breathe through your nose if you can. Focus on your breathing. Place your hand on the place that seems to rise and fall the most as you breathe. If this place is on your chest, you will need to practice breathing more deeply so your abdomen rises and falls most noticeably (when we are nervous or anxious, we tend to breathe short, shallow breaths in the upper chest). Now place both hands on your abdomen and notice how it rises and falls with each breath. Notice if your chest is moving in harmony with your abdomen. Continue to do this for several minutes. Get up slowly. This exercise is something you can do during a break at work. If you can't lie down, you can do it sitting in a chair.

### **6. DEEP BREATHING**

This exercise can be practiced in a variety of body positions; however, it's most effective if you can do it lying down with your knees bent and your spine straight. After lying down, scan your body for tension. Place one hand on your abdomen and one hand on your chest. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose into your abdomen to push up your hand as much as it feels comfortable. Your chest should only move a little in response to the movement in your abdomen. When you feel at ease with your breathing, inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth, making a relaxing whooshing sound as you gently blow out. This will relax your mouth, tongue, and jaw. Continue taking long, slow, deep breaths that raise and lower your abdomen. As you become more and more relaxed, focus on the sound and feeling of your breathing. Continue this deep breathing for five to ten minutes at a time, once or twice a day. At the end of each session, scan your body for tension. As you become used to this exercise, you can practice it wherever you happen to be, in a standing, sitting, or supine position. Use the exercise whenever you feel tense.