

# Relaxation and Stress Reduction Techniques (Controlled Breathing)

## Counselling Service Tip Sheet



There are many physical, biological and psychological benefits to be gained from using relaxation techniques. These benefits have been widely documented, with immediate effects including (to name just a mere few) lowered heart rate, blood pressure and cortisol levels. In the longer term, relaxation practice can assist you to sleep better and to strengthen your immune system, making you less susceptible to sickness and disease. Pain can also be better controlled with regular specialised relaxation practise. On the psychological side, relaxation can increase your sense of general well-being and improve your capacity to think clearly, focus and sustain your attention, manage stress, regulate emotions and increase awareness – particularly good news for students!

The instructions overleaf will guide you through the [Controlled/Abdominal Breathing](#) relaxation technique. It can be particularly helpful to record these instructions onto an audio device (e.g. MP3 player/voice recorder) so that you can work through the activity without reading.

1. Note the level of tension you are now feeling.
2. Place 1 hand on your abdomen just below your rib cage.
3. With your hand still there inhale slowly and deeply through your nose to completely fill your lungs.
4. Pause for a moment and then slowly release the air through your nose or mouth. Exhale the air as fully as you can.
5. As you take another breath in, you should feel your hand on your abdomen slowly rise as it expands with air. Your chest should only move slightly.
6. Again, take in another very slow, full, deep breath into your abdomen. Feel your hand rise and your chest only slightly expand.
7. Pause slightly.
8. Then let all the air out again, slowly and fully. Allow your whole body to feel limp like a rag doll.
9. Try to make the breaths as smooth and even as you can, without gulping the breaths.
10. When you are ready, take another 3 cycles of breaths in and out, slowly, at your own pace. On the breath out you may choose to say a calming word to yourself like "relax", "calm" or let go".
11. When you have finished, let the hand that is on your abdomen rest loosely next to your side.

The calming breath is a potent technique for halting the momentum of a panic or stress reaction when the first signs start. Practicing this technique 5 minutes each day for at least 2 weeks at a regular time can assist to "damp down" the physical reactions to stress. In time you will have retrained yourself to breathe from your abdomen which will assist you in feeling relaxed on a more ongoing basis.

## References

More information is available from:

- Counselling Tip Sheet: The Benefits of Relaxation

## Acknowledgements

Editors: Mel Johnston and Bronwyn Williams

Please note that this tip-sheet provides information and guidance only - it is not a substitute for professional counselling and support.

## ECU Counselling Service

Reception: Mount Lawley: Building 3, Room 128

Joondalup: Building 34, Room 245

Phone: 9370 6706 Email: [counselling@ecu.edu.au](mailto:counselling@ecu.edu.au)

CRICOS IPC 00279B