

Breathing Away Stress

Since yesterday at this time you have probably taken about 20,000 breaths. What if you could learn to make even a tiny improvement in the way you breathe? Since you take so many breaths, that tiny change could create an important difference in your well-being.

When we are under stress, our abdominal muscles tighten. Our breathing speeds up and becomes shallow. The breath shifts away from the belly area into the chest. But unless we are running from wild tigers, this type of “fight or flight” breathing only worsens our stress.

Fortunately, you can take charge and breathe in a healthier way. Relax your stomach muscles and take deeper, slower breaths.

Let your belly muscles stay soft. Breathe so that your abdomen expands with the in-breath.

Breathing away stress is a skill. The more you practice, the more skillful you become. Put the following “skill builders” into practice. In addition, use your creativity to come up with additional ways to free your body from unwanted stress. Write your new skill builders on the back of this sheet. And put them into action!

◆ Skill Builders ◆

- ◆ *As you go through your day, occasionally notice your breathing. Let your breathing be easy, pleasurable, rhythmical, full.*
- ◆ *Every now and then take in several big, long, deep breaths. After each in-breath, hold it for a few seconds. Then gradually, easily, let your breath out. Notice the gentle feeling of relaxation and balance.*
- ◆ *Stand out in the fresh air. Take in a very full, slow, deep breath through your nose. As you breathe in, gradually raise your arms high over your head. At the same time gently but firmly tense all the muscles in your body. Then exhale through your mouth, softly making the sound “Ahhh.” Also as you breathe out, lower your arms, letting your whole body relax. Repeat three times.*
- ◆ *Practice “belly breathing.” As you slowly breathe in, let your belly expand like a balloon. As you easily exhale, let your belly come in. Belly breathing—or more technically correct, diaphragmatic breathing—is nature’s way. It calms and energizes. Make it a habit.*

QuickSkills # 7, by Sam Quick, Human Development & Family Relations Specialist. (1997) FAM-QS.107

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