

Breathing techniques



You have probably heard of fight or flight before. When you feel stressed or anxious, your body goes into 'fight or flight' (or freeze) mode to help you escape the negative situation that you are in. That's a really good thing if you're in danger, but not nearly so good when life is stressful.

These breathing techniques will help you get your body into 'rest and digest' mode instead, so that you can calm down.

Start by placing one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest. Take a few deep breaths.

Where did you feel the most movement?

If you felt most movement with the hand on your chest, then you are doing thoracic breathing. This is really good in some circumstances like sports, but it might mean that you're feeling stressed.

Try to breathe deeply, using your diaphragm and filling your lungs.

If you felt most movement in the hand on your stomach then you are doing diaphragmatic breathing, which will help you feel calmer!

If you want to know more about how your body responds to stress, search for the Crash Course channel on YouTube and watch the videos on the autonomic nervous system and the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems for a quick (but in-depth) summary.

When you get really anxious, it can make you feel a bit light-headed. You might even have experienced a panic attack before. It can feel like you're not getting enough oxygen but actually, you are often getting too much. Exhaling for longer than you inhale will help you redress the balance. Try breathing in through your nose for five seconds, and then out through your mouth for seven or eight. If you can't manage those numbers then reduce them to begin with. The counting will help you calm down too, because it uses parts of your brain that are associated with 'rest and digest'.

If you are feeling really anxious or overwhelmed, it can really help to hold your breath. Make sure that you don't hold it for longer than is comfortable, and not more than a couple of times in a row, but it can really help the extra oxygen to dissipate.