



# Reducing anxiety by breathing well



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This is a deceptively simple way to feel calmer inside. Practise it regularly and it will change the way you feel, even in difficult situations.

Breathing in for a count of 7 and out for a count of 11 is an easy way to calm the body down. Put simply, as we breathe in the heartbeat quickens and blood pressure goes up, but as we breathe out the reverse happens.

In other words, breathing out is associated with a state of more calm. You can exploit this by simply breathing out more slowly so the out breath takes longer. Over a few minutes you will feel the effect getting stronger, especially if you practise regularly.

It will make you feel a bit drowsy or detached, so do not do it when driving, operating machinery, looking after children taking a bath, etc. Here's how to do it:

- Find somewhere comfortable to sit and relax.
- Sit in a chair with your shoulders relaxed and your hands folded over your stomach
- Breathe in through your nose for a count of 7, then purse your lips and breathe out through your mouth for a count of 11. You may find it helps to start with breathing in for 3 and out for 5, then work up to 7/11 - it really doesn't matter as long as you breathe out for longer than you breathe in).
- Let the air go all the way down so your stomach rises as you breathe in and your shoulders stay still. This diaphragmatic breathing is also associated with relaxation and calm.
- Once you are into a rhythm, start to notice the way muscles around your body change as you breathe out. Maybe start with your toes, letting your toes relax as you breathe out, then work up with each breath out: through your ankles, calves, thighs, stomach and so on until you get to your eyes, letting all the muscles around your eyes relax as you breathe out.
- Keep going for as long as you like. Maybe use some relaxing music, timed so that you can gently bring yourself back to normal wakefulness at the end - and carry the extra calm around with you for the rest of the day

Do this three times a day for at least ten minutes, and notice how you change over a month or two. You should find it easier to get to sleep, to focus, and to think about how to solve problems.



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