

Relaxation Breathing

Few of us need to be encouraged to be mentally active. Most of us need a nudge—or a shove—to take time every day for mental rest and relaxation. Deep relaxation breathing is one of the best and most effective tools, but it is so simple, most people discount it. It's the same breathing that's taught in yoga and childbirth classes. This rhythmic breathing releases not only stress and tension, but endorphins, the chemical in our brain that causes us to feel good. I'm told endorphins have the same molecular makeup as morphine! We have this “drug” on tap and forget to use it by doing rhythmic breathing.

I was a childbirth educator for thirteen years and I taught moms to breath slow, deep and easy to reduce stress in labor. The same principles apply as we “labor” through life. When laboring women get too stressed, they have increased adrenalin and that shuts down the release of oxytocin which makes the uterus contract and the baby come out. Too much adrenalin from increased stress makes for a longer, harder labor.

Stress raises adrenalin levels in all of us, putting us into the “fight or flight mode,” an ancient survival mechanism left over from when cavemen were chased by wild beasts. In this mode, our bodies send all the energy and circulation to the organs needed at that moment, and takes energy away from those not needed for survival then. That's why our hearts beat so fast and our breathing is so rapid when we get scared. We need a heart beat and breathing to survive. What we don't need is a bladder. That's why kindergarteners wet their pants on stage. They are so nervous up there trying to sing their songs, their little hearts and lungs working overtime to help them survive. That's why the bride has to go to the bathroom just one more time before she walks down the aisle or guys at work have to duck into the men's room before talking to the supervisor. Think of the last time you were really nervous and afraid. Did you have to go to the bathroom?

You've likely read stories of a hero in a “fight or flight mode” who lifted a car off the injured victim, proving that adrenalin kicks in to help the organs needed to survive. Too much adrenalin, however, interrupts healthy body function. Breathing and relaxing decreases adrenaline output and allows all of our organs and body parts to work at their best and “save” us.

Let's breathe slow, deep and easy three to four times a day for three to four minutes and relax.

Relaxation Breathing:

Simply breathe In-two-three-four, Out –two-three-four. The breaths should be slow, deep, and easy from your abdomen. Imagine a hot air balloon expanding in your chest with each breath, then deflating as you exhale. Breathe in a relaxing pace you could keep up for hours, never feeling short of breath. Breathes will grow deeper as you continue. You can add a thought with each, perhaps breathing in thinking, "I am-two-three four" and out "relaxed-two-three-four." Continue this for three to four minutes, three to four times a day. The good news is we can do it in the breakroom, bathroom, even at our desks or the bedside.

Robert Louis Stevenson said, "Quiet minds cannot be perplexed or frightened, but go on in fortune at their own private pace, like the ticking of a clock during a thunderstorm."

Quiet your mind. Breathe. Relax.

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