



Breathing, Relaxation and Meditation

The mind and body are designed to work in harmony with very little visible effort. At best, the mind and body work as one. When a person experiences stress, the mind begins to race which, unfortunately, increases anxiety. When the stress response occurs, over 1400 physiological changes are activated. When one of these physical changes occurs, the others follow. Learning to calm your body and clear your thoughts before and during a challenging task or activity helps you bring your mind and body into harmony. This can be accomplished through a simple series of breathing, relaxation and meditation exercises.

Breathing: *Take a series of 3 deep breaths, first emptying your lungs of air then inhaling slowly through your nose allowing the air to fill your stomach. Breathe out slowly through your mouth allowing the exhale to last twice as long as the inhale (e.g. inhale for 2 seconds and exhale for 4 seconds, then 3/6 and 4/8). Make sure that you are breathing with your diaphragm (stomach goes out when you inhale) rather than your chest.*

Relaxation: *Beginning at the top of your head, locate each muscle group in your body moving slowly from head to neck to torso to extremities. As you find each muscle, tense it for a period of 2 seconds as you inhale diaphragmatically, then allow it to completely relax for 4 seconds as you slowly exhale. Imagine the tension leaving your body as you gradually move through each muscle group with each breath until you have tensed and relaxed each muscle from head to toe.*

Meditation: *Choose a pleasant word or visual image that you can hear and see in your imagination. Think of this word or image every time you exhale for about 15 minutes each day. If you have an intrusive thought or feeling during your meditation, return to the repetition of your relaxing word or image. Use this word or image during your task or activity to return your mind and body to harmony.*