

Deep Belly Breathing: A Simple Tool for Better Wellbeing

In today's fast-paced world, stress, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed can have a significant impact on our physical and mental health. While there are many ways to improve wellbeing, one of the simplest and most effective techniques is deep belly breathing, also known as diaphragmatic breathing. This natural breathing method can help calm the mind, reduce stress, and improve overall health when practised regularly.



What Is Deep Belly Breathing?

Deep belly breathing involves breathing deeply into the lungs using the diaphragm, a large muscle located beneath the lungs. When breathing correctly, the diaphragm moves downward, allowing the lungs to fill more fully with air. As a result, the stomach expands on the inhale and falls on the exhale.

Many people develop a habit of shallow chest breathing, particularly when stressed or anxious. This type of breathing uses the muscles in the chest, shoulders, and neck rather than the diaphragm, making breathing less efficient and potentially contributing to feelings of tension and anxiety.

How Deep Belly Breathing Helps Our Wellbeing

Reduces Stress and Anxiety

One of the most well-known benefits of deep belly breathing is its ability to reduce stress and anxiety. Slow, controlled breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, often referred to as the "rest and digest" system. This helps counteract the body's stress response and promotes feelings of calm and relaxation.

Research has found that just five minutes of controlled breathing exercises each day can improve mood, reduce anxiety, and lower physiological signs of stress.

Lowers Heart Rate and Blood Pressure

Deep breathing can help slow the heart rate and reduce blood pressure. When we are stressed, our heart tends to beat faster, and our blood pressure may rise. Belly breathing encourages the body to relax, helping cardiovascular functions return to a calmer state.

Improves Sleep

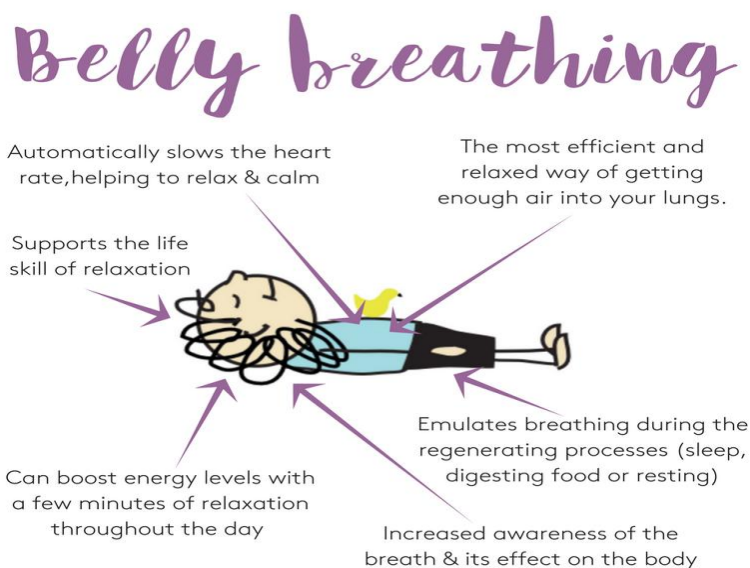
Stress and racing thoughts are common causes of poor sleep. Practising deep belly breathing before bedtime can help quiet the mind, relax the body, and prepare for sleep. Breathing exercises are commonly recommended as part of good sleep hygiene because they help reduce tension and promote relaxation.

Enhances Focus and Emotional Regulation

When we feel calm, our brains are better able to concentrate, make decisions, and regulate emotions. Deep breathing can help us pause during stressful situations, think more clearly, and respond rather than react impulsively.

Improves Breathing Efficiency

Diaphragmatic breathing allows the lungs to work more efficiently by increasing the amount of air taken in with each breath. This can improve oxygen exchange, reduce the effort needed to breathe, and strengthen the diaphragm over time.



How to Practice Deep Belly Breathing

The good news is that deep belly breathing can be practised almost anywhere and only takes a few minutes.

Step 1: Get Comfortable

Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor, or lie comfortably on your back. Relax your shoulders and neck.

Step 2: Position Your Hands

Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach, just below your ribs. This helps you feel how your body moves as you breathe.

Step 3: Inhale Slowly

Breathe in slowly through your nose for a count of four or five. Allow your stomach to rise as your lungs fill with air. The hand on your stomach should move more than the hand on your chest.

Step 4: Exhale Gently

Breathe out slowly through your mouth. Let your stomach fall naturally as the air leaves your lungs. Try to make the exhale slightly longer than the inhale.

Step 5: Repeat

Continue this pattern for three to five minutes. With regular practice, the technique becomes easier and more natural.

Tips for Success

Practise daily, even when you are not feeling stressed.

Choose a quiet environment when learning the technique.

Avoid forcing your breath or breathing too deeply, as this can feel uncomfortable.

Use belly breathing before meetings, exams, presentations, bedtime, or whenever you feel overwhelmed.

Deep belly breathing is a simple but powerful technique that can have a positive impact on both physical and mental wellbeing. By slowing the breath and engaging the diaphragm, we can reduce stress, improve relaxation, support healthy sleep, enhance emotional regulation, and improve breathing efficiency. Best of all, it is free, easy to learn, and can be practised almost anywhere. By incorporating just a few minutes of deep belly breathing into each day, individuals can build resilience and improve their overall sense of wellbeing.