



Vagal Breathing for Stress & Anxiety

Step One

Get Comfortable

Find a place to sit or lie down in a relaxing environment without distractions

for example, no TV or distracting noises playing in the background You can play some meditation or gentle acoustic music if there's outside noise that can't be reduced

Step Two

Reduce Tension

Close your eyes, pay attention to any tension in your muscles, unclench your jaw, shake out your shoulders and stretch up to reach the sky to open up the muscles in your back

Step Three

Take a breath

Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your belly Breathe in slowly through your nose for 3 seconds, your belly should expand while your chest stays still

Hold the breath for 3-4 seconds

Breathe out through your mouth for 4-5 seconds

Step Four

Keep Breathing

Repeat breathing steps 4-5 times, or until your anxiety starts to ease and the mind begins to quiet

If it feels comfortable you can take slower deeper breaths for longer

For example, breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 5 seconds, breathe out for 6 seconds

Do this upon rising in the morning, before bed, or before a stressful event to help reduce stress and anxiety

Why Vagal Breathing Works

Understanding the link between deep breathing and your nervous system.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPATHETIC (SNS) AND PARASYMPATHETIC (PNS) NERVOUS SYSTEMS?

Our SNS system is commonly known as the "fight or flight"/"stress" response, it is mediated by hormones adrenaline and cortisol, these hormones allow for quick energy production to allow us to get out of danger, but they also linger around leaving us in a "stress state". On the other hand, our PNS system is "rest and repair", in this state we digest and absorb nutrients, produce brain chemicals such as GABA for relaxation, and allow us to obtain an optimal sleep routine. When we are stuck in an SNS dominant state our digestion, metabolism and excretion pathways slow, we release stored glucose for energy and our ability to produce and utilise relaxing brain chemicals stops effectively working.

UNDERSTANDING THE VAGUS NERVE

The Vagus nerve is the chief nerve of the PNS, it plays a key role in regulating our bodies to support a healthy balance. If you have ever heard of the gut-brain-axis, one of the key nerves that connect the brain to the gut is the Vagus nerve, this triggers our digestive system into releasing the necessary substances such as hydrochloric acid and digestive enzymes so that we can digest and absorb nutrients.

By "activating" the Vagus nerve we can switch our bodies from "stress mode" into "rest, digest, and repair mode"

HOW DO WE ACTIVATE THE VAGUS NERVE?

Studies show that deep belly breathing increases vagal activity by influencing electrical pulses from the diaphragm to the brain, positive emotional and cognitive effects are found with regular vagal stimulation.

USING BELLY BREATHING IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Whenever we are going into a stressful situation, having a hard day, or just needing to relax, deep belly breathing is a quick and easy tool we can use to relax and promote a healthier stress response.