

Give us a break!

Resource sheet 4 Breathing exercise

Stomach Breathing Relaxation Exercise

*** Note for facilitators: it might be a good idea to practise this exercise yourself before taking the group through it. Adjust the language as necessary for your group.*

This activity will help you to relax and become more aware of your breathing.

Make sure you are sitting comfortably in your chair.

1. Put your right hand on your stomach just over your belly button. Put your left hand, palm facing outwards, on the small of your back where it curves. Relax your neck and shoulders and try to keep them relaxed throughout this breathing exercise.
2. As you are sitting there, imagine a string is attached to the top of your head and is gently pulling up and supporting your head, helping your posture to be upright and relaxed. Keep relaxing your neck and shoulders. Bend your head slightly forward so that you can just see your right hand on your stomach. Don't lean so far forward that you strain your neck; just far enough to release the great amount of tension that often gathers in the back of your neck. Keep your upper body relaxed and light in feeling.
3. Try to breathe in and out in a smooth, easy way. Don't force your breath or breathe in any way that feels uncomfortable.
4. Feel the hands on your stomach and back being pushed out as you breathe in and coming closer together as you breathe out. Imagine that the air coming into your lungs fills your stomach just like a bottle being filled with water; a bottle doesn't fill from the top. The air goes to the bottom of your lungs first, pushing your hands out with your stomach. (20 sec pause).

5. If it feels comfortable to you, let a natural pause happen at the end of your inbreath and outbreath. Don't have this pause if it causes you to feel short of breath or panicky. (20 sec pause).
6. Try to let your breathing come into a natural rhythm, like waves breaking on the shore. Let it happen automatically, without any effort from you. (20 sec pause).
7. Once you feel this natural, effortless rhythm happening with your breathing, let the thought come into your mind of breathing in positive things and breathing out negative things. You decide what the good and bad feelings might be; positive things might be light, energy, happiness and so on; negative things might be tension/tightness in certain parts of your body, moodiness, unnecessary anger, sadness, tiredness, thoughts that you find unpleasant and so on. Again, try to let this type of stomach breathing become a natural effortless rhythm. (30 sec pause).
8. Be aware of how it feels for you to breathe in this way so that you can describe your feelings to the others. (10 sec pause).
9. Now really stretch and take a few deep breaths to become fully alert again.

You can practise this stomach breathing anytime you feel upset or worried. Try it out at home this week. You can try practising it lying down on your bed or on the sofa. You could even use a bean bag, soft toy or put your hands on your stomach to feel your stomach rise on an inbreath and sink down on the outbreath. The more you practice, the easier it will become and the more you will notice any upsetting feelings you have go away or reduce.

