

CONTROLLED BREATHING EXERCISE

When you become anxious and breathe too fast, you breathe out too much carbon dioxide. This leads to a decrease in the level of carbon dioxide in the blood, which in turn causes or worsens a number of symptoms such as *breathlessness* or *light-headedness*. You may experience these symptoms if you have panic attacks, or periods of marked anxiety. People who are depressed often also feel anxious and nervous. This may cause their breathing to change and result in the symptoms described above.

At rest the average person needs only 10-12 breaths per minute. This will increase if you are doing physical activity. You can work out your breathing rate by timing it over 1 minute (breathing in then out is counted as 1 breath). If your breathing rate is too high, learning to control your breathing can help you feel better. Breathing slowly will also help you to relax. When you are relaxed, you are in a better shape to tackle any problems that you may be facing.

If you have sleep problems associated with depression, practising breathing exercises when going to bed is a very effective way of helping you fall asleep and stay asleep.

To help you control your breathing a number of simple steps can be taken. You will find these steps described on the next page.

Remember! Learning takes practice, so make sure you practise these simple breathing exercises regularly.

Breathing Exercise

Instructions:

1. Sitting or lying down, make yourself comfortable.
2. Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Repeat this once.
3. Close your eyes. Focus your mind on your breathing.
4. Breathe easily and gently with no effort.
5. Breathe in steadily over 3 seconds.
6. As you breathe out steadily over 3 seconds, say to yourself: "Relax." At the same time, let your muscles relax – let them go loose and floppy.
7. Keep repeating this in a 6 second cycle (3 seconds in and 3 seconds out) over and over and keep letting go every time you breathe out.

This exercise should be practised for at least 3 to 5 minutes each time and several times a day. Fill out the table below to show your doctor how often you have been practising.

Write the date in the first column and the number of minutes you practised each time in the other columns. You can write any comments in the last column.

DATE	1	2	3	4	5	Comments
Eg 15/5/01	4 minutes	5 minutes	3 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	

