

This week we'll focus on a simple breathing exercise. Effective and relaxed breathing is a good form of stress management and revitalizes one's energy. At this point, you may be thinking "I've been breathing my whole life... do I really need to learn how to breathe?" Well, let's find out.

Sit comfortably in a chair and put one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. Breathe normally for about 60 seconds and pay attention to where your breathing is mainly coming from... Is it your chest? Your Stomach? Well, so where SHOULD it come from? If you've ever watched a baby breathe, you will probably know the answer. Their belly goes up and down while their chest is mostly still; they don't have any worries about noisy neighbors, bills to pay, or stressful jobs.

Unfortunately as adults, many of us tend to "forget" this natural way of breathing and start breathing with the chest, and sometimes even with the shoulders, which becomes very tense and uncomfortable. So let's take a few minutes to practice breathing with our stomach area - or diaphragmatic breathing as we will now call it.

Get a small object, for a example a book or a plate. Clear the area of all distractions (no worries - kids, spouses and pets can survive without you for 5 minutes) and lay down flat with your back to the floor. Place the object on the stomach, making sure neither the chest nor the pelvic area supports the object and begin by simply slowing your

breathing down.

Continue, now taking deeper and deeper breaths, breathing in through your nose, and breathing out through your lips (as if breathing through a straw). Try to let your stomach - your abdominal area - do the breathing for you, as you see your object move up and down. Let your shoulders and chest rest as you continue breathing deeply and rhythmically while your belly goes up and down. Now close your eyes, and imagine your stomach expanding like a balloon for each inhale, and deflating like a balloon for each exhale. Continue for a few minutes, enjoying the relaxed feelings but still focusing on taking deep breaths with your abdominal area. If you want to add another element, imagine yourself breathing in energy and life into your body for each inhale, and tell yourself "relax" or "let go" for each exhale. Ideally, the whole exercise should take about 15-20 minutes, but even if you do it for only a few, it will still be helpful .

Practice this every day, and you will soon see some lasting benefits. If don't get it quite right the first time, don't despair. If you have been holding a lot of tensions and/or you are so used to breathing with your chest, this may take a couple of attempts. Breathing deeply and with your diaphragm allows you to experience the full capacity of your lungs. You will feel more refreshed, relaxed and revitalized, as well as experience a reduction of fatigue and stress.