

BREATHING PRACTICES FOR CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION: The respiratory system has a regulating effect on all our body systems (heart, nerves, muscles, digestion). We can learn to relax and control our whole body by practicing these breathing exercises.

1. BALLOON BREATHING

Sit up straight, place one hand over your stomach and concentrate on your breathing. Feel how your stomach fills up as you breathe in and goes down as you breathe out. Imagine a balloon inside your stomach that fills itself with air as you inhale and empties itself of air as you exhale. Try to feel the balloon with your hand. Notice your whole body relaxing as your breathing becomes deep and full. Practice this exercise for about one minute and use this technique whenever you feel anxious.

Alternate instructions for young children: "Lie on your back and place a teddy bear or other stuffed animal on your stomach. Watch the animal as you breathe and try to make it move up and down as you breathe in and out."

2. BREATHING WITH SOUNDS

This exercise can be done with children in a group or individually. Inhale deeply and make a soft sound, such as AH, HA, O, OO or MMM, as you exhale. You can also use animal noises. In a group, select a leader to choose the sound and have the others copy the sound. A variation of this exercise is to make the sound last as long as possible, followed by a deep, full inhalation.

3. BREATHING BY NUMBERS

A. Calming Breath: For this breathing practice, try to make your in-breath and out-breath equal in time. Do this by counting slowly (one second for each count) as you breathe in and then counting for the same amount of time as you breathe out. Practice this breathing exercise for about two minutes once or twice each day, and use it whenever you feel tense or anxious.

B. Counting Breath: This exercise can be introduced as a method of relaxation involving counting, where each count represents one second. Each in-breath is the same for the count of 2, and each out-breath increases by 2, as follows:

In 2—Out 2

In 2—Out 4

In 2—Out 6

In 2—Out 8

In 2—Out 10

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SLEEP

DISCLAIMER: This list of suggestions is for your interest only and is not intended to be prescriptive for individuals. Information is compiled from a variety of sources. Discuss all treatments with your personal health care professional.

- Relaxing ambiance at nighttime (e.g. dim lighting)
- Establish a consistent sleep cycle 7 days a week
- Make sleep a priority and avoid temptation to stay up late
- No television within one hour of sleep (too stimulating)
- Warm bath (or foot bath): 92-97 degrees F (see also aromatherapy below)
- Avoid daytime naps if difficulty falling asleep at night
- Use bed only for sleep
- Quality sleep requires a good mattress that provides comfort and support
- Regular exercise aids sleep (but not within two hours of bedtime)
- Relaxing activity (reading, gentle music, breathing exercise) before bedtime
- If wake up and can't resume sleep, get up and do something (go to bathroom, drink water or herb tea, read) until fatigue induces sleep
- Food considerations: avoid over-eating and stimulants (chocolate, sodas, black tea, coffee ice cream or chemical additives that increase heart rate) before bed. "Good foods" for sleep include tea with chamomile (e.g. "Sleepytime Tea") and "Horlick's Hot Malted Milk" (verified by research)
- Herbs for sleep: valerian root (tincture—one dropper in water, capsule, or tea—one teaspoon in water steeped for 10 minutes), hops (tea with or without valerian), ladyslipper (tea, mood elevator, induces sleep), other tea combinations (chamomile, passion flower, catnip, skullcap, lime flower, cowslip flower), herbs with relaxant properties (anise, balm, cayenne pepper, dill, heather, marjoram, poppyseed, lemon, verbena, California poppy, rosemary, peppermint, gotu kola)
- Aromatherapy: chamomile (6 drops) or lavender oil (6 drops) or blossom (5 drops) added to warm bath. Steep a combination of valerian root, lime blossom, and chamomile in boiling water for 10 minutes and add to warm bath.
- Massage: gentle stroking and kneading of body or just feet, massage oil with lavender and chamomile