

## Starting a Daily Breathing Practice

Breathing difficulties are associated with autostress. When you have problems with your breathing, you lower the amount of carbon dioxide that's normally in your blood. This leads to a wide range of symptoms, including:

- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness
- Tingling or numbness in the arms, fingers, toes, or around the mouth
- Feeling dizzy and light-headed
- Weakness
- Heart pounding and racing
- Heart palpitations
- Sweating or hot flushes
- Headaches
- Feeling sick
- Fatigue

These symptoms can appear out of the blue and can also lead to panic attacks.

Your breathing difficulties may be related to:

- *Shallow breathing* (breathing in too quickly)
- *Over-breathing* (breathing in more air as you feel like you're not getting enough, for example through yawning or sighing frequently)

Some people experience both.

So, let's take a moment to test your breathing:

1. Put one hand on your chest, and one on your belly.
2. Breathe for a few seconds. Which hand rises?
3. If it's your chest, you might have developed a habit of shallow breathing.

Although the effects of shallow breathing can be very unpleasant, it won't harm you, and you can reverse the habit with a daily breathing practice. The next time you feel anxious, take a moment to notice your breathing. Focus on breathing through your stomach so that your belly rises when you inhale and drops when you exhale.

Here's a belly breathing exercise you can practice for 5-10 minutes a day:

- Inhale gently, lightly and slowly count to four, expanding your belly as you do so,
- Hold that breath for a count of two,
- Slowly exhale through your mouth for a count of six.

This is referred to as 'belly breathing'. Research shows that practicing regular belly breathing can help people feel calmer within a matter of weeks.



### Top Tip

You can use the breathing timer function on the free [Stop, Breathe and Think app](#) to complete your daily breathing practice. They also have a great kids version!

