

DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING TO REDUCE ANXIETY, ANGER, AND STRESS

When the body is confronted with physical or mental stress, certain processes occur which promote the “fight or flight” response. These include muscle tension; increased heart rate; the release of adrenaline, norepinephrine, and cortisol into the system; and a change in breathing from your diaphragm to your chest. Chest breathing signals danger and makes you feel anxious—diaphragmatic breathing signals the brain that everything is OK and helps you feel calm.



Practice diaphragmatic breathing until you are confident that you can easily switch to it when you begin to feel anxious, angry, or stressed. You can practice by placing one hand on your chest and one on your abdomen to see which hand moves when you breathe. Your goal is to have only the hand on your stomach moving. This is best practiced lying down because you can see the rise and fall more easily.

When you start to feel tense, be sure you are breathing using your diaphragm rather than your chest muscles. It is believed that if you change to diaphragmatic breathing within 17 seconds of an anxious thought, it prevents the release of anxiety-producing chemicals and therefore an entire hour of anxiety can be prevented.