



Breathing for Mental Health

Why is breathing important?

Breathing is important for us to live. Breathing can often become fast and/or shallow. For some of us this can be constant. For others, it can happen when we are stressed, in pain, panicked, or anxious. Many of us may not even realize this is happening. When your breath becomes shallow and fast, your nervous system becomes more stressed and can lead to mental and physical health problems. Since breathing is so important, it is best to take deep, slow breaths. Practicing breathing exercises can help you breathe in a more relaxed way more of the time, which ultimately is better for your health.



How can breathing help my mental health?

There are many benefits to relaxed breathing. It can help your body and mind become calm. It can help you deal with stress. Practicing breathing before bed can help you fall asleep. Studies show that breathing exercises can help lower blood pressure.

How do I get started?



There are many ways to practice breathing. Below are just a few you can try. Take time to find the exercise that feels and works best for you. The more relaxed and comfortable you are during the breathing exercise, the less stressful and more effective it will be. Breathing exercises can be done anywhere. When you are first starting, it can be helpful to find a quiet space where you won't be disturbed. This can help you become more comfortable to do the practice later anywhere you go such as in the car, at work, or in the shower. Many of these exercises can be done without anyone knowing you're doing them. You can spend as much time as you would like doing a breathing exercise. To start, set aside 5-10 minutes. You can do it for a longer or shorter time depending on what works for you. You can use breathing exercises as often as you would like. The more often they are practiced, the more effective they can be. They can be used in times of stress or anxiety and daily for relaxation.



What are some examples of breathing?

Box Breathing- Sit with your back supported in a comfortable chair and your feet on the floor or laying down on a flat surface. Close your eyes or gaze downward. Breathe in through your nose while counting to four. Then hold your breath while counting to four then exhale for 4 seconds then hold 4 seconds. Making a complete box. Try to repeat several times.

Belly Breathing- Sit with your back supported in a comfortable chair and your feet on the floor or laying down on a flat surface. Put 1 hand on your chest and 1 hand on your belly. Inhale deeply through your nose. Try to keep your hand on your chest from moving while watching the hand on your belly expanding. Breathe out through your mouth watching your belly deflate. Do this several times until you feel more relaxed.

4-7-8- Breathing Technique-breathing in quietly through the nose for 4 seconds. Holding the breath for a count of 7 seconds. Then exhaling forcefully through the mouth. This one can be hard and you might not be able to make it at first but keep practicing



Why shouldn't I do breathing exercises?

If you have trouble breathing, are on oxygen, or become dizzy or lightheaded easily, you may need extra support to do breathing practices. If so, talk with your doctor before doing breathing exercises.



If you have any questions or would like to discuss this further please contact Cyndie Gilliam LMFT TANF Therapist @ 760-330-3913 or cgilliam@sctca.net