

BREATHE.....

Controlling your breath is vitally important for relaxation. Short, shallow breathing with your upper chest actually promotes a physiological stress response in our body and leads to chronically tense neck and shoulder muscles. Most of us need to relearn how to breathe with our diaphragm in order to reduce anxiety and restore a sense of calm. The diaphragm is a muscle that when it is underused becomes weak and so this exercise might feel awkward at first. You will get the hang of it quickly and once your breathing pattern is restored, you will be in control of your reaction to stress. Breathing from your diaphragm will allow your body to feel in control and minimize the sensations of panic that stress can cause. Practice the breathing exercise below and reconnect to your inner peace.

Basic Breathing 101 – practice intentionally several times throughout your day

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
- Place one hand on your belly button and the other on your upper chest.
- Take a long, slow deep breath. Notice which hand is moving out as you inhale. If it is your upper hand on your chest, you are in fight-or-flight mode which is our body's stress response. We want the hand on your belly button (which is right over your diaphragm) to be doing all the work. You should breathe in and inflate your belly like a balloon, leaving your upper hand still. Your shoulders should have no role in breathing.
- This will seem awkward at first. Just concentrate on pulling the air in through your nose down all the way into your belly to fill your body up - from the bottom up.
- Your belly will push out with the inhale and this may seem exaggerated -we are not used to sticking our bellies out. In the beginning it takes more force to get the diaphragm to do it's job. Eventually you will be able to keep the hand on your upper chest still during the inhale and let your neck grow long as your shoulders relax.
- Exhale completely counting to four in your head.

Variations:

Imagine that the air you breathe in is pure white, cleansing air and the air you breathe out is dark brown and carrying with it all of your body's impurities.

With the inhale, say to yourself - "Breath is peace, I am calm"

With the exhale, say to yourself - "Letting go of tension and stress"

Count up from 1 to 4 with the inhale and then down from 4 to 1 with the exhale

To enhance a deep feeling of relaxation – pause between each complete breath.