

## BREATHING RETRAINING

Breathing is an essential part of life and plays an essential role in anxiety. This simple breathing retraining technique uses breathing patterns to help you deal with anxiety.

When our breathing rate becomes elevated, a number of physiological changes begin to occur. You might suddenly gasp, feel a little breathless and a little light-headed, as well as feeling some tingling sensations around your body. The way we breathe is a major factor in producing these and other sensations that are noticeable when we are anxious.



### Anxious Breathing

Anxiety causes an increase in our breathing rate, as part of the physical fight or flight response to a perceived threat. However, when our breathing rate increases without any physical exertion, we breathe out too much carbon dioxide. If the body cannot quickly return carbon dioxide levels to the optimal range, we experience further symptoms such as dizziness, light-headedness, headache, weakness and tingling in the extremities and muscle stiffness.

The normal rate of breathing is 10-14 breaths per minute – what's your breathing rate?

### Breathing Retraining

While temporary overbreathing and hyperventilation are not specifically dangerous, continued overbreathing can leave you feeling exhausted or “on edge” so that you’re more likely to respond to stressful situations with intense anxiety and panic.

### Gaining Control

This process involves both slowing your rate of breathing and changing your breathing style. The following steps will help you develop a better breathing habit.

- 1 - Ensure that you are sitting on a comfortable chair or laying on a bed
- 2 - Take a breath in for 4 seconds (through the nose, if possible)
- 3 - Hold the breath for 2 seconds
- 4 - Release the breath taking 6 seconds (through the nose if possible). Pause slightly before breathing in again.

### Breathing Tips

- When you first begin changing your breathing, it may be difficult to slow your breathing down to this rate. You may wish to try using a 3-in, 1- hold, 4-out breathing rate to start off with.
- When you are doing your breathing exercises, make sure that you are using a stomach breathing style rather than a chest breathing style. You can check this by placing one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. The hand on your stomach should rise when you breathe in.
- Try to practice at least once or twice a day at a time when you can relax, relatively free from distraction. This will help to develop a more relaxed breathing habit.
- The key to progress is practice, so try to set aside some time each day.

**By using breathing retraining you can slow your breathing down and reduce your general level anxiety. With enough practice, it can even help to better cope with anxiety when you are in an anxious situation.**

Modified from the Centre for Clinical Interventions