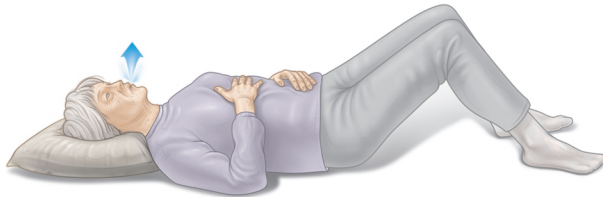


Breathing Problems: How to Control Stress



Stress can cause shortness of breath or make it worse. Once you start feeling short of breath, it is common to get nervous or anxious. This can make your shortness of breath even worse.

Being anxious tightens the muscles that help you breathe, and this makes you start to breathe faster. As you get more anxious, your breathing muscles get tired. This causes even more shortness of breath and more anxiety. At this point, you may panic.

Learning to avoid or control stress can help you avoid this cycle. You can learn tips to help you relax and learn breathing techniques to get more air into your lungs.

Learn to relax

Find what triggers your stress, and avoid those things as much as you can.

When you start feeling stressed, find a quiet place where you can relax. Try these relaxation tips:

- Tighten and relax each muscle in your body. You can begin at your toes and work your way up to your head.
- Imagine your muscle groups relaxing and becoming heavy.
- Empty your mind of all thoughts.
- Let yourself relax more and more deeply.
- Become aware of the state of calmness that surrounds you.
- When your relaxing time is over, you can bring yourself back to alertness by moving your fingers and toes. Then move your hands and feet, and then stretch and move your entire body.

As you relax, do **diaphragmatic breathing**. It helps your lungs expand so they take in more air.

- Lie on your back or prop yourself up on several pillows. With one hand on your belly and the other on your chest, breathe in. Push your belly out as far as possible. You should be able to feel the hand on your belly move out, while the hand on your chest should not move.
- When you breathe out, you should be able to feel the hand on your belly move in.

Once you can do diaphragmatic breathing well lying down, you can learn to do it sitting or standing.

Stop the panic before it starts

If you start feeling short of breath, remain calm. Stop what you are doing, and lie down if you can. If you cannot, then sit in a chair and relax your shoulders as much as you can. Put your arms on a table or desk in front of you. Lean forward and start your **pursed-lip breathing** exercise. Pursed-lip breathing helps you breathe more air out so that your next breath can be deeper.

- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth while almost closing your lips.
- Breathe in for about 4 seconds and breathe out for 6 to 8 seconds.

If you are still having trouble breathing, use your inhaler as directed by your doctor.

Questions to ask your doctor

Use the space below to list your questions or concerns. Take this sheet with you to your next doctor visit.

Questions about how to control stress: