



Take a deep breath to stay calm and relaxed

Calm breathing exercises have many health benefits, including reducing stress and anxiety to promote feelings of relaxation. Read on to find out how including breathing exercise as part of your everyday routine can benefit your health.

Health benefits

When under stress, the fight or flight response is triggered, increasing heart rate and muscle tension while breathing becomes faster and more shallow. Taking deep breaths can help reverse this and promote a calmer, more relaxed state^{1,2}.

Any time, anywhere

You can practice your breathing exercise anywhere. For maximum benefit try to practice each day, for example, as part of your evening routine to wind down. You can also do the exercise when out and about to restore your inner calm if a moment of stress or anxiety takes you unawares^{1,2}.



Get comfortable

Stand, sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Make sure your feet are hip width apart and loosen any clothes or items of jewellery that might restrict your breathing. If lying down, relax your arms with palms facing upwards^{1,2}.

Get started

Take a deep breath...

Breathe in and let your breath flow deep into your lungs, without forcing it. Breathe in gently through your nose and out through your mouth, if possible^{1,2}.

...Count if you like...

Some people find it helpful to count steadily from one to five while breathing in. If you can't reach five, count as high as you can go comfortably and then see if you can increase this with practice.

Then let it go...

Without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently. Count again, if you find this helpful. Keep doing this for three to five minutes.

Try to find a regular rhythm you are comfortable with to maximise your feelings of calm and relaxation^{1,2}.

Give your circulation a helping hand

Taking a deep breath can also be beneficial for your limb condition. When we breathe in, a negative vacuum is created in the chest and stomach area that helps to return blood to the heart — this is known as the thoracic pump. Taking deep breaths while lying down can help your body to clear fluid from your tissues, helping any swelling you may have.

Steps for stress: videos and playlist

Steps for Stress is a resource from NHS Scotland that has numerous videos demonstrating a variety of breathing and relaxation techniques. An accompanying downloadable playlist and audio guide is also available to help you control stress and understand where it comes from, as well as learn more about how and why breathing exercises work. ➤

Access the *Steps for Stress* resources at: 2. www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/stress/breathing-and-relaxation-exercises/