

The essential anxiety tool: a diaphragmatic breathing exercise

"I can't keep calm, because I can't breathe!"

When we are anxious we are in a '[fight or flight](#)' state. This is when the body pumps itself up with adrenaline and cortisol for a situation that it perceives as a 'threat'. Today's threats are mainly psychological, but your body reacts in a primal physical way, which while thinking it's being helpful, is obviously quite unhelpful in many cases.

We can often have problems with breathing when we're anxious and panicky - whether low or moderate or high. This post will help you to manage that.

What is happening?: fight or flight instructs your body to **take in extra oxygen** and empower the lungs to help fight or flee from the perceived 'threat' - but without fighting or running **you're not burning the extra oxygen**, so it causes you to have to take short quick breaths, to '**overbreathe**' - which can escalate to hyperventilating when in full panic attack mode. The change in breathing itself is often enough to accelerate panic - so be aware of this, **be aware of what is happening and why it is happening** - and learn and use the following **DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING EXERCISE** - the essential tool for you to return your body to homeostasis and to calm you down.



- **Take a long slow 4 second breath in through your nose, noticing the rise of your rib cage.**
- **Hold this breath for 4 seconds, then exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds.**
- **Wait a beat of 4 seconds - then repeat the cycle.**

Make this a habit. Practice it until it becomes routine and automatic.

While breathing change your thinking, develop a mantra, maybe something like:

"It's okay, I just have extra oxygen that I'm going to stabilise.. No thank you body, I don't need fight or flight right now, there is no tiger, I'm okay, it's okay, and, breathe...."

Adding a [mindfulness](#) routine can be very helpful in managing anxiety..

And of course, you can use CBT strategies to develop [new healthy ways to think](#) and explain the world to yourself, decreasing your incidences and strength and duration of fight or flight. It's a science, it works. [Try this blog](#) (iveronicawalsh.wordpress.com) as biblio-therapy to learn the self help components of modern psychotherapy, and *apply apply apply*...

And apply again! Until new healthy thinking becomes automatic and takes the place of your current negative automatic [bad thinking habits](#).

Good luck!

