

Diaphragmatic Breathing to Reduce Pain & Stress

People experiencing pain tend to hold their breath during a flare-up or breathe fast and shallow — especially when anxious. The fight-or-flight response is triggered when we are in pain or stressed. This increases our heart rate and muscle tension in our jaw, head, neck, and back. Tensing up the body further aggravates the pain itself. One way to turn off the fight-or-flight response is through diaphragmatic breathing — also called belly breathing.

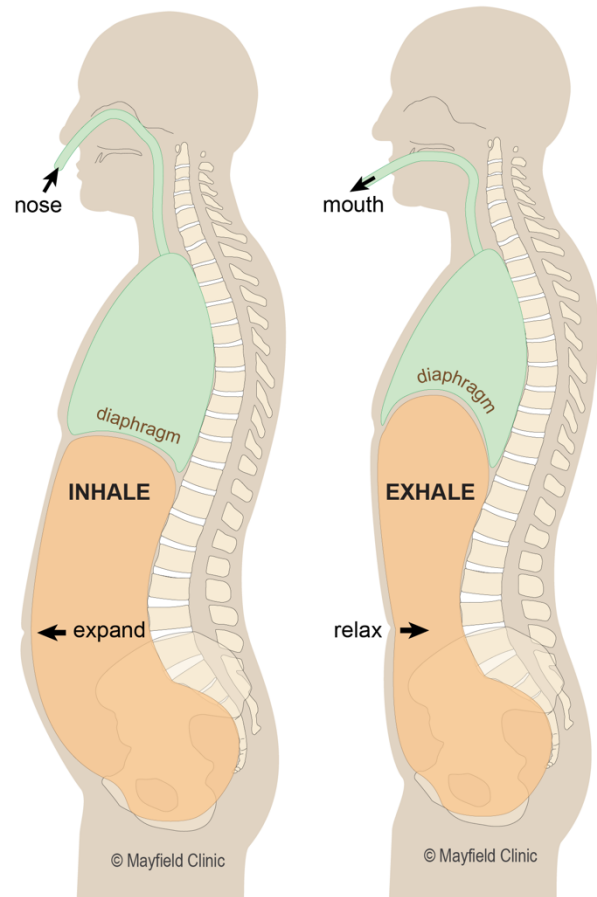
Basic Diaphragmatic Breathing:

Find a comfortable position for you (lying down, reclined, or sitting).

- Inhale = smell a flower
- Exhale = gently blow out a candle
- When you inhale, visualize your abdomen and pelvic area filling up with air — expanding and stretching like a balloon
- When you exhale, visualize the abdomen and pelvic area relaxing — like a balloon deflating without air
- Take 10 slow breaths

Advanced Diaphragmatic Breathing: (FOCUS ON A LONGER, SLOWER EXHALE)

- Inhale normally / quietly to a count of 4
- Hold your breath for a count of 1-2
- Exhale slowly for longer
- GOAL = 8 count exhale (4:8 RATIO)
- If you cannot achieve the 4:8 ratio, any breath with a longer exhale is good (5, 6, 7 count). Or the ratio may change to a 3-count inhale: 6-count exhale
- Repeat for a total of 5 breaths
- Rest and breathe normally for a minute and observe how your body feels
- Repeat another 5 breaths



Visualize a balloon expanding with the inhale, hold, and then slowly deflating with the exhale. Place one hand on your belly to feel the breath. Don't move your chest.

Tips: Many muscles are susceptible to tension. Relaxing the muscles of the face, jaw, neck, shoulders, abdomen, hips, legs, and feet will also help.

Moment-to-Moment Relaxation:

- Scan your muscles throughout the day.
- If tension is noted, take a few moments to focus on your breathing and allow yourself to relax those muscles.



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