BREATHING RETRAINING FOR ADULTS

Most of us realize that our breathing affects the way that we feel. For example, when you are upset, you may think of taking a deep breath to calm down. Or, when you are anxious, you may breathe in quick, shallow breaths. Very often, when people become frightened or upset, they feel like they need more air, and they may hyperventilate (breathing very quickly and shallow) in response to that feeling. Taking a deep breath or breathing quickly often does not help. In fact, hyperventilation causes anxious feelings. Unless you are preparing for a really dangerous situation, you often don’t need as much air as you take in. When you hyperventilate and take in more air, it signals your body to prepare for danger. If you feel anxious and want to calm down, you need to slow down your breathing and take in *less* air. **You should take a normal breath and exhale slowly.** It is *exhaling* that is associated with relaxation, not *inhaling*.

Breathing fast and taking deep breaths are common responses to stress and anxiety. Such habits can be hard to break. Learning to control your breathing takes daily practice. You will find it helpful to first practice at times when you are not anxious. Later, when you have learned breathing awareness and control, you will find it helpful in more stressful situations.

* Increase awareness of your breathing patterns.
* Slow down your breathing.
* Practice using breathing exercises to decrease your anxiety.

# Instruction

1. Take a normal breath in through your nose with your mouth closed.
2. Exhale slowly through your nose with your mouth closed.
3. When exhaling, say the word **CALM** or **RELAX** (or some other word that you find soothing) very slowly, for example: “c-a-a-a-a-a-a-l-m” or “r-e-e-e-e-l-a-a-a-x.”
4. Count slowly to four and then take the next inhalation.
5. Practice this exercise several times a day, taking 10 to 15 breaths at each practice.

