

Slow breathing

I never thought this one could work, until I started showing other people how to do it and it actually made me very relaxed. It gives me a very quick reduction in anxiety, from 9 out of 10 (panicky) to 7 out of 10 (anxious). I might even take you from 6 out of 10 to a 4 out of 10, so that it's easier to fall asleep.

“I thought breathing exercises were a load of rubbish, but they actually worked”

Mike's brother was a heroin addict for about ten years. I was pretty tense when he was round the house and on drugs. I'd sometimes get a bit panicky thinking about what could happen to him or my mum. I thought the slow breathing was load of rubbish until I actually tried it. It's all about the out-breath. It doesn't get rid of the anxiety completely, it just makes things feel a little easier to handle. I found that the more I practised it, the easier it was to do when the s**t really hit the fan.

How do you actually do it?

This one is simple, but takes a little bit of practise to get the hang of.

Step 1 - Breathe all the way out (every last bit of air!)

Step 2 - Pause briefly, and allow your lungs to fill up naturally with air. Don't force the air in.

Step 3 - Pause briefly, and then empty your lungs completely.

Step 4 - Repeat for the rest of your life.

The more you do this exercise, the better you'll get, so when things start to get bad you'll more easily be able to practice this technique.

How does it actually work?

When you are stressed out you tend to breathe more quickly and shallowly (you chest moves more than it should, and your belly moves less than it should). This means the balance of CO₂ and O₂ in your lungs gets out of whack, which signals to your brain that you should go into panic mode.

When you breathe slowly, you bring the balance of CO₂ and O₂ in your lungs back to normal. You're aiming to work the diaphragm (a piece of muscle at the base of your lungs). If you push your belly button up and back towards your spine, you're working the diaphragm to push all the air out of your lungs.

Slow breathing also helps to 'ground' you in the moment and can make you feel more centred. This means you're less likely to get too carried away in worried thoughts.