

Taking a few moments each day to relax can help improve your focus, concentration, and ability to do well. Follow the directions below to learn an easy way to relax yourself by focusing on your breathing.

- ♦ Get into a comfortable position – either laying down or sitting. If you choose to sit, keep the spine straight and let your shoulders drop.
- ♦ Close your eyes if it feels comfortable (you can leave them open if you prefer).
- ♦ When you first begin doing these exercises place your hand on your stomach in order to bring attention to your diaphragm. Notice as it rises or expands gently on the in-breath and falls or recedes on the out-breath.
- ♦ Keep the focus on your breathing, “being with” each in-breath for its full duration and with each out-breath for its full duration, as if you were riding the waves of your own breathing. Notice as your breath enters your body, how your lungs fill with air and your chest muscles stretch or expand. Notice as your breath leaves your body and the slight pause that occurs before you breathe in again. For some people it helps to visualize ocean waves or wind gently blowing against the leaves of a tree with each in- and out-breath. Find the visualization that works best for you.
- ♦ Practice “breath counting.” Each intake of air counts as one number. When your breathing gets interrupted by a thought you simply return to the number one and begin counting upward again.
- ♦ Every time you notice that your mind has wandered off the breath and onto a thought, notice what it was that took you away and then gently bring your attention back to your diaphragm and the feeling of the breath entering and leaving. If you are counting breaths when you've come back to your breath you start over with 1.
- ♦ For some people it helps when they have a goal # of breaths to work toward, however it is okay if it takes time before you are able to count past 1. Everything gets better with practice. If your mind wanders away from the breath a thousand times, then your “job” is simply to bring it back to the breath every time, no matter how it has become preoccupied.
- ♦ Practice this exercise every day for 5 minutes over the next week. Five minutes is the amount of time it takes to get a cup of coffee or wait for your food to be done. If you have difficulty finding time during the day, perhaps it would be better to do these exercises right before you sleep.

(Adapted by Kimberlee DeRushia, Psy.D.)