

BREATH CONTROL FOR PAIN CONTROL – ANYONE CAN DO IT



Breathing is, of course, essential to survival. Sometimes, though, it becomes too rapid, especially in stressful or painful moments. By learning to control our breath, we learn to relax, reduce stress and diminish the perception of pain.

Although it's quite natural for our breathing to speed up when we're feeling pain, this tendency can actually increase pain and physical tension in our body. Furthermore, breathing too quickly can cause one or more of the following problems: dizziness, a feeling of suffocation, muddled vision, sudden tiredness, pins and needles in the hands or feet, damp palms, stiffness and muscular tension, hot flashes, excessive perspiring, increased cardiac rhythm, and so on.

Abdominal breathing, also known as abdominal respiration (lowering and raising the diaphragm by use of the abdominal muscles) can help you return your breathing to its normal rhythm, with a consequent reduction of the unpleasant symptoms noted above.

Abdominal breathing is good for your body!

The first step is to notice the way you breathe normally. The following exercises will help you do that.

- 1- Count the number of breaths you take in a minute. One inhalation and one exhalation count as a single breath.
- 2- Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach in order to ascertain which of the two moves the most when you breathe.

If you're taking more than 14 breaths a minute, and if your chest moves more than your stomach, you're the perfect candidate to practise abdominal breathing in order to relax your muscles and diminish your pain.

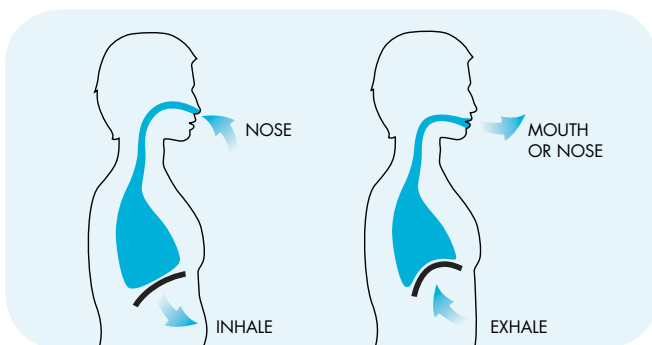
Abdominal respiration: learning to breathe with your stomach.

- The ideal position for practising abdominal breathing is on your back with your legs slightly raised by a pillow. If this is uncomfortable or inconvenient for you, sit on a comfortable chair with your back well supported by the chair.
- Make sure your clothes aren't putting pressure on your stomach or restraining it.
- Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
- For about three seconds, push out your stomach to breathe in.
- To breathe out, let your stomach return to its normal position for about five seconds, but don't pull it in.
- It may help to imagine a balloon in your stomach that is being filled when you breathe in and which empties when you breathe out.
- If your chest increases in size more than your stomach, apply slight pressure to it to control the expansion and allow your stomach to expand instead.

- Remember to exhale slowly for at least three seconds. Don't worry, after practising a few times you'll get the hang of it.
- Run through your abdominal breathing exercises every day for at least five minutes if you can. With practice, you will be able to do it several times a day, or whenever you feel the need.

By taking time out to practise, you'll see that your body will soon get used to abdominal breathing without difficulty.

A little bit of practice now will go a long way to attenuating your pain in the future.



www.programmeaccord.org

This brochure was produced by the ACCORD team – Working together for the management of chronic pain.

For more information about chronic pain, go to www.chronicpainquebec.org or contact l'Association québécoise de la douleur chronique (AQDC) at 514.355.4198

ACCORD
Working together for the management
of chronic pain