

BREATH WORK TECHNIQUES FOR RELAXATION

The Sigh Breath - The "Instant Tranquillizer"

The *Sigh Breath* is a very simple breathing method for releasing tension in your chest, diaphragm and neck areas. It can be an excellent way of managing the symptoms of anxiety or panic.

It is a moderate (rather than very deep) inhale through the nose followed by a fairly prolonged and slow exhale through the nose or mouth - as a prelude to allowing your breathing to become slower and shallower.

How to use the Sigh Breath

1. Mentally think or say to yourself **Stop!**
2. Now breathe in through nose slowly and evenly. Pausing for just a second let the air out quite slowly through your nose. Remember that the inhale is a moderate, rather than a very deep in-breath. The out-breath is the key to the method. Be sure to prolong it. L-e-n-g-t-h-e-n your exhale. This helps retain carbon dioxide - your "Natural Tranquillizer."
3. As you let the air out **let go!** Relax your muscles - release as much tension as you can. Pay particular attention to the muscles in your **Face, Jaw, Shoulders, and Abdomen.**
4. Pay attention to the natural pause that occurs at the end of the exhale. No need to think about breathing in - this will happen naturally after a second or two. Simply enjoy this moment of stillness between breathing cycles.
5. As the in-breath begins, direct your attention *outside* yourself to what is happening in the *outside* world - "*See Clearly - Hear Clearly.*" Silently pay attention to what you can see and hear without listing or naming anything.

Although the method involves five steps, the whole cycle of in-breath - brief pause - out-breath takes only a few seconds.

The Sigh Breath is a way of *interrupting* the buildup of physical stress and tension rather than a breathing technique to do over and over again. Initially one or two Sigh Breaths every half hour or so may be appropriate. Then aim to reduce the need to do it except for very tense periods.

Why use the Sigh Breath?

The Sigh Breath can become your "instant tranquillizer." It is a deceptively simple little technique which has many benefits.

Benefits:

- It instantly reduces your tension level through temporarily raising your blood carbon dioxide level.
- The "See Clearly - Hear Clearly" part of the method directs your attention outside of yourself. This interrupts the common and un-useful tendency that most of us have, when we feel anxious or upset, to ruminate - to become very absorbed with our thoughts and feelings.
- It engages your attention for a few moments. When you use it regularly you momentarily interrupt your internal stress-building loop, The loop in which your stressful thoughts result in stressful feelings which, in turn, exacerbate the stressful thoughts of negative thoughts - negative feelings - negative thoughts. This technique takes you out of the loop and into practical action.
- It helps draw your attention to the build-up of physical tension in your body - and especially in the throat, chest, and abdomen.
- It gives you something to do when you feel anxious or panicky, rather than simply remain a passive victim of your reaction to a situation.
- It makes you aware of and interrupts the common tendency to hold or restrict your breath when anxious.

Easy Breathing

Maintaining an *easy breathing* pattern, where your chest and diaphragm are relaxed and moving naturally in harmony with each inhale and exhale helps re-develop and maintain a comfortable physical state with a clear and alert mind.

(In the beginning it is likely that accumulated tensions and poor breathing habits may have produced an uneven breathing pattern. If this is the case you may find it helpful to first use the Sigh Breath method a few times to begin calming and stabilizing your breathing.)

How to use Easy Breathing

1. Pay attention to the natural, effortless movement of your breathing cycle. Feel the movements and sensations. (If necessary use two or three Sigh Breaths first.)
2. Pay attention to the inhale, then the slight pause, followed by the natural exhale, and then another slight pause.
3. Aim to have your breathing become shallower and slower. Do not force this otherwise it will have the opposite effect. The slowing down should occur gradually and gently.
3. Do this for three to ten minutes - paying attention to nothing else.

Through practice you may discover ways of utilizing Easy Breathing as a *Quick Relaxer* - a way of relaxing quickly for a few moments. As you experiment with the different breathing methods aim to discover which methods work best for you in different situations in your life.

When to use Easy Breathing

1. Whenever you wish to pace yourself and maintain a calmer and more centered internal state - at work, in sport, socially, etc.
2. When you wish to clear your thinking in order to give your full attention to an important matter.
3. As a Quick Relaxer - especially when it is inappropriate to relax with eyes closed, or to fully stop what you are doing.
4. To develop the habit of maintaining a clear mind and calm body. Use Easy Breathing in odd spare moments: in elevators, in waiting lines, in waiting rooms, at traffic lights, during the commercial breaks when watching TV, while listening to someone, waiting on the phone, or when you are being delayed. In this way you can turn what might have otherwise been a frustrating or irritating event into a beneficial and centering experience.
5. To develop an on-going natural awareness of your physical state - so that any chest tightness or breathing unevenness alerts you to take action to clear your thinking and calm your body.
6. To train yourself to feel mentally and physically comfortable even when under pressure.

Benefits of Easy Breathing

- Helps defuse the physical effects of the stress response.
- Provides an instant break and reduces frantic mental activity by centering your attention on a single issue rather than having it scattered.
- Gradually builds up your depleted store of carbon dioxide - your 'Natural Tranquilizer.'
- Enables you to take a mental and physical break without stopping what you are doing.
- Enables you to maintain physical comfort while being mentally active.