

Breathing your anxiety out

Preliminaries

H E A L

Have a positive experience

Enrich it (smells, sounds, sights, and tactile sensations etc.)

Absorb it

Link it to the negative

The first thing that must be done is to get relaxed. The most effective visualizations occur while your brain is producing alpha waves. Alpha waves result from complete relaxation. When you are in the relaxed alpha state, your brain power is in a heightened state of suggestibility. Sit down in a comfortable place. Be sure your head has support and that it is not too hot or too cold. You will begin by focusing on your breathing. Normally you are unaware of breathing, so by focusing on breathing you are making your unconscious conscious. As you relax, your parasympathetic nervous system gets more active, which calms down the fight-or-flight sympathetic nervous system. Tension drains out of your body, your heart rate and breathing slow down, and digestion eases—all of which turns down the dial on internal signals of threat, helping you relax even further.

Record the following instructions

Start by sitting quietly and becoming aware of your surroundings.... Locate yourself in space and time. Feel your back and bottom touching the chair you're sitting in.... Feel your clothes on your body.... Hear as many different sounds as you can hear.... Feel the air in the room.... Just for now, there's no place you have to go and nothing you have to do.... Just be here now.... You can close your eyes if you haven't already done so.... You can be aware of your breathing.... Feel the air as it comes in and as it goes out.... Be aware of how it feels in your nostrils as you breathe in and as you breathe out.... If you have interrupting thoughts, that's okay. You can just notice them as if they were the sentences going across your TV screen during a program announcing heavy rains or an approaching storm. The important thing is just to notice them. Just allow them to pass by.... You can be aware of your breathing again.... Feel the air as it comes in and as it goes out.... Be aware of how it feels in your nostrils as you breathe in and as you breathe out....

Now imagine that you can see a white vapor as you breathe out — like seeing your breath on a cold day . . . Starting with your forehead, notice any tension there and breathe into it. If there is tension, breathe it out. See the tension as black dots in the white vapor as you breathe out. Breathe in and out until the vapor is pure white . . . Next focus on the area around your eyes. Notice any tension and breathe it out. . . Next focus on your facial muscles . . . breathe out any tension . . . Next focus on your neck muscles . . . breathe out any tension

. . . Next focus on your shoulders . . . breathe out the tension. Next focus on your hands and arms . . . breathe out the tension. Next focus on your chest. . . Take several deep breaths and breathe out any tension. Next your stomach . . . breathe out the tension . . . Next focus on your buttocks . . . breathe out any tension . . . Next on your knees . . . breathe out any tension . . . Next on your calves and ankles . . . breathe out any tension. Next on your feet . . . breathe out any tension.

Now just allow your whole body to relax. Imagine that you've become like a hollow bamboo shoot. A warm golden energy is coming in through the top of your head and going out through your toes. Allow every cell in your body to relax . . .

H: Imagine being in relaxing settings, such as on the beach under a warm sun.

E: Open to relaxation, and feel what it's like. Let it fill you, becoming more intense. Stay with it, help it last. Let go more and more as you relax. Give yourself over to a delicious sense of calm. Notice different aspects of this experience, keeping it fresh for you. Feel a growing tranquillity. Notice how it is in your body that sense of relaxation

A: Sense that relaxation is sinking into you, becoming a part of you. As you become more relaxed, you can feel any tension or resistance falling away.

L: Relaxation is sinking into and easing places inside you that have been tight or contracted. Tension is easing as relaxation settles down into it like a gentle rain. When you want, let go of any negative material and just stay with the sense of relaxation.