

Balanced Deep Breathing

A related way to manage your anxiety is to practice balanced, deep breathing. Many people breathe shallowly or irregularly when they are anxious or tense. These breathing patterns lead to an imbalance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the body, which can cause the physical symptoms of anxiety. For example, when we breathe more shallowly, we take in less oxygen. One of the functions of the heart is to pump oxygen throughout the body via the blood stream. If the heart gets less oxygen, it beats faster to try to supply the same amount of oxygen to the body.

In the beginning, it is important to practice balanced, deep breathing for at least four minutes at a time, because this is roughly how long it takes to restore the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in your body. The balancing works most effectively if you breathe slowly and deeply in and out for an equal amount of time.

If you put one hand on your upper chest and one hand on your stomach, your hand on your stomach should move out as you breathe in. You start by breathing in to a slow count of 4 and out to a slow count of 4 for four minutes. It doesn't matter whether you breathe through your mouth or your nose; breathe whichever way is comfortable for you. Be sure to breathe gently and not take big gulps of air. Try to keep your attention on your breath and the motion of your hand on your stomach as it moves up and down. When you find your attention drifting elsewhere, just bring it back to your breathing.

It helps to practice this skill when you are not highly anxious. If you practice balanced deep breathing for four minutes at a time, four times a day for a week, you will get quite skilled at it. Then you are ready to use it to manage your anxiety and help you stay for longer periods of time in situations in which you feel anxious.