

## Just Breathe.... Counteract Stress by Taking a Few Deep Breaths!

Stress kind of trashes our body. And while it is actually important for our life (we need it for when tigers are chasing us, and for motivation, growth, and to operate effectively,) activating the stress response again and again, day in and day out for problems big and small can really start to muck up the works.



Here's good news! Activating what is called the "Relaxation Response" actually counteracts stress's body-wrecking effects. You can actually put those problematic stress chemicals on hold.

So, what we're talking about is different from the zoning-in-front-of-the-TV sort of relaxation. The relaxation response is a "state of deep rest that is the polar opposite of the stress response. The relaxation response puts the brakes on stress and brings your body and mind back into a state of equilibrium." And this can be done by utilizing some relaxation techniques, one of which is simple deep breathing.

When the relaxation response is activated, your:

- heart rate slows down
- breathing becomes slower and deeper
- blood pressure drops or stabilizes
- muscles relax
- blood flow to the brain increases
- improved immune function
- pain relief
- increased energy
- improved concentration and focus

Breathing exercises are great, because anyone can do them, anywhere. You don't need anything else, and they're pretty easy to learn, too.

Here's a great way to get it going on for both adults and kids:

Mindful Breathing Games:

- **Expandable Sphere:** Using a [Hoberman](#) mini sphere toy is a clever way to demonstrate the breathing process to children. The sphere is expanded while breathing in and collapsed while breathing out.
- **Heart Hands:** Similar to using the sphere, have your children create a heart shape with their hands. As they breathe in, they can expand their hands into a heart shape. As they breathe out, their hands collapse into two fists side by side. This is an easy on-the-go exercise since no props are necessary.
- **Birthday Candle:** Ask your children to pretend they are blowing out a birthday candle. They should take a deep breath in and then push the breath out as if they are extinguishing a fire. The more stress they feel, the more birthday candles they should imagine blowing out.

### Tips:

1. As you breathe, let your abdomen expand and contract, rather than moving your shoulders up and down. This deeper breathing is more natural and similar to how babies breathe. It gives you increased lung capacity, whereas the 'shallow breathing' adults usually utilize doesn't allow as much oxygenation of the blood.
2. Don't breathe too quickly or too slowly; just breathe at a natural rate, but more deeply.
3. If you find your thoughts drifting a lot at first, don't worry that you're doing it 'wrong'. Noticing that you've drifted and refocusing to your breathing is part of the practice and something you're doing 'right'!

*(Info from [HelpGuide.org](#), and [verywellfamily.com](#).)*