

Just Breathe

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Breathing may seem like a mindless act that simply provides our bodies with oxygen so they can function, but breathing incorrectly can result in a multitude of unpleasant side effects. People who regularly breathe with short, shallow breathes are essentially in state of constant hyperventilation. This results in higher levels of carbon dioxide and lower levels of oxygen in the blood stream. This in turn can cause high blood pressure, faster heart beats, muscle tension, jitteriness, dizziness, and disorientation. These symptoms, as well as improper breathing, are prevalent among individuals suffering from anxiety and panic disorders. Breathing incorrectly can lead to a series of physiological circumstances, which will decrease overall well being.

So, how do you know if you are breathing correctly? A simple test can tell you the answer. Count the number of breaths you take in 30 seconds and multiply it by two. An inhalation and exhalation count as one breath. The average number of breaths taken per minute by people who are not suffering from anxiety problems is 8 according to Dr. Allan Vives, Ph.D. from Georgia Southern University. If you are taking more than 8 breaths per minute, then this could be causing you to suffer from several of the symptoms listed above. Another sign that there is not enough oxygen in your blood is frequent sighing.

If you are an individual who breathes short, shallow breaths, then you can train yourself to take deep, abdominal breaths. This is known as diaphragmatic breathing. Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your abdomen. Take a few breaths and pay attention to how your breathing moves your hands. If you are taking a proper abdominal breath, the hand on your chest should not move at all, and the hand on your abdomen should rise as you inhale and fall as you exhale. Once you get the hang of breathing from the abdomen, try to inhale for four counts and then exhale for four counts. By practicing these exercises you can recalibrate your breathing to slow, deep abdominal breaths.

For further instruction on breathing and relaxation exercises go to www.counseling.ilstu.edu. In the self help section there are several tools that can be used to aid in the acquisition of these skills.

Next time you're feeling stressed or anxious, take a minute to evaluate your breathing. You may realize that the root of your problem is short, shallow breathing. By focusing on your inhalations and exhalations, you may find that the simple solution to your problem is to just breathe.