

A person is shown in a meditative pose, sitting on a blue mat. Their hands are held in a mudra (prayer position) with fingers touching. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting with natural light. A blue semi-transparent shape is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text.

Wellbeing toolkit

Breathing techniques
for relaxation

The power of the breath

Our mind and body are so strongly linked, and we can choose to use one to influence and calm the other.

A simple way we can help to control our stress response is through being aware of and controlling our breathing.

Proper breathing physically helps us to relax and calm down and prevents anxiety-associated hyperventilation.

Calming breathing can be used anywhere and at any time to help you calm down and relax. Try the techniques in this factsheet to get started.



In this factsheet

- What happens when we breathe properly
- The benefits of deep breathing
- Diaphragmatic breathing
- Calming breathing
- Further resources

What happens when we breathe properly

Though we do it every minute of every day, few of us actually breathe properly.

Mostly, we end up 'chest breathing', only filling the top part of our lungs with air.

By taking the time to fill our lungs properly, we increase the oxygen supply to our brains, stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system.

In simple terms, deep breathing helps move our mind and body out of the 'fight or flight' mode and into relaxation mode.

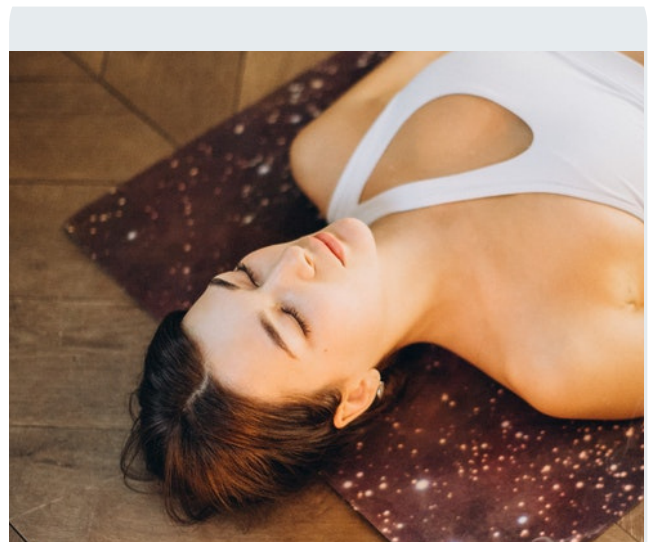
In addition, taking the time to focus on breathing can in itself help bring us back to the present moment, reducing stress and anxiety levels.

The benefits of deep breathing

When we take the time to relax and breathe deeply, there are a number of physical and mental benefits:

- Reduced stress and anxiety
- Increased feeling of relaxation
- Reduced muscle tension
- Decreased heart rate
- Stabilised blood pressure
- Improved attention span
- Lowered pain levels

Setting aside a small amount of time to practise deep breathing each day can help keep stress levels in check during this difficult time.



Diaphragmatic breathing

- Lie on the floor placing a small pillow under your head and another under your knees (this is optional).
- Place your hands flat across your stomach with just the tips of your fingers touching.
- 'Bell' out your stomach as you breathe in, filling the lower part of your lungs with air (your fingers should move apart) and count to three.
- As you breathe out to the count of three, your stomach muscles should flatten again and your fingers will be drawn together.



Calming breathing

- Position yourself in a quiet environment
- Make sure the air temperature is comfortable
- Sit comfortably in a chair or in a relaxed position
- Drop your shoulders naturally, so that your lungs can fully expand
- Gently lift your head and fix your eyes straight ahead of you; don't strain
- Take five slow, steady breaths
- Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth
- Begin 'Calming Breathing' by breathing in easily and gently to the count of three, holding for a second, then breathing out to the same count of three

Further resources

Our yoga teacher, Joanna, has been supporting the Westfield Health team with remote classes.

She's shared her top three breath work and relaxation videos:

- [Breathing Techniques for a quiet mind](#)
- [3-minute counting the breath meditation](#)
- [25-minute relaxation meditation "yoga nidra" practice](#)

You could also try these 10 breathing exercises for stress relief from [healthline.com](https://www.healthline.com).

Wellbeing resources

This factsheet is part of our series of free resources aimed at helping teams look after their physical and mental health.

Take a look at our [HR Resources](#) and our [blog](#) for advice and toolkits to help look after your people and your business.