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## **Diaphragmatic Breathing and Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

Here's an introduction to a time-honored and proven way of relaxing your body and mind. Because you're facing challenges and stress, I'd like you to work on developing this practice in your life – as a way of caring for yourself.

At first, set aside five or ten minutes twice, or at least once, a day to develop a practice of regular relaxation. Do it first when you're already fairly relaxed – not in the middle of a panic attack. Like you learned to ride a bike as a kid, start with the easier terrain. You practiced lots. It felt good. And then later you were ready to tackle the mountain biking stuff. If you make relaxation your daily practice, you'll get better at it. And you'll find what works the best for you, even though you'll start with some basic steps and guidelines.

Even with a little regular practice, you'll notice how tension builds up in your body in different situations and with changes in your pain. You'll become more aware of what your body is up to. And you'll naturally begin to relax more easily.

And with steady practice, you'll make these relaxation steps your own. You'll be able to tackle tension that naturally comes with pain and stress. And you may notice that your relaxation skills help manage the impact of chronic pain in your life. You may find that you can manage anxiety and conflict better. And, you might nap and sleep easier.

And, I promise - no side effects or drug interactions at all.

One more thing: When you practice this at home, I'd like you not to practice it while lying down. People tend to get too drowsy, fall asleep, and not remember what the relaxation was like. So while you're learning, do it sitting in a comfortable chair or couch. Or if you can't find a quiet seat, sit propped up in your bed at first. You have to be awake to learn and develop the practice of deeper relaxation.

### **Step 1 – Relaxed Abdominal Breathing:**

Like every relaxation and meditative tradition, we'll begin with a focus on natural and relaxed abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing.

In your house, find a comfortable chair in a quiet place. Get rid of distractions.

Remember how children breathe with their diaphragm when relaxed. Forget all those posture lessons from Mom or your teachers or scout leaders or friendly military officers. No "Atten-shut! Chest out! Shoulders back! Belly in!" Let all that stuff go .... Think about how singers of all types breathe. You don't see their chest and shoulders heaving with effort. They look relaxed, and they are relaxed. The same is true even for competitive target shooters. They relax to breathe and let their tension go.

So while breathing, relax your abdominal and lower back muscles. Slouch... Be at ease... Like this....

You may want to put your hand on your belly button and use it as a feedback device. Like this....

Now, let your diaphragm drop down and let your stomach expand as you take a nice easy breath. Like this....

And, bring your stomach back in while you breath out. Like this ....

Think of expanding your belly and back "inner tube" as you inhale. Gently fill 'er up. And then gently let your "inner tube" come back in again as you exhale. You don't need to force a deep "cleansing" breath or clutch your breath at the top of the inhale. Think of it as a nice, easy, natural cycle of relaxed and comfortable breathing. Like this ....

Try it a few more times. To keep a nice easy rhythm, you may want to count to three or four while you inhale and to four or five while you exhale. Always count to one more number while you exhale and relax. Like this.... Keep your mind on gently breathing with your counting.

Now let yourself take about six relaxed diaphragmatic breaths. Remember: Breath in by letting your belly expand down and out. Then shift naturally to breathing out by letting your diaphragm and belly come back up and in. And, notice how you begin to relax and calm yourself with this gentle breathing. Enjoy the feeling.

(Note: If it really difficult to breathe with your diaphragm, just tuck your chin while inhaling and bring your head back up while exhaling. This interferes with upper chest breathing.)

### **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:**

Now, while you're taking these easy, relaxed breaths, I'd like you to tighten one group of muscles while you breathe in, and relax those muscles while you breathe out.

Let's start with the **hands and forearms**, since they're pretty easy to feel and control. As you breathe in, gently tighten your hands and forearms and notice the mild tension. Like this.... Pay attention to the difference between the tension in your arms, wrists, palms, and fingers when you tighten them gently. And then when you exhale, let them slowly relax. Like this... As you let the tension go, just notice and enjoy the comfortable relaxation in your muscles. It's not important to tense them real tightly – just enough to be aware of the tension as you inhale - and to enjoy the relaxation as you let all the tension go. Enjoy the relaxation as you exhale and let your muscles, tendons, and joints slowly unwind. Enjoy that feeling. Go ahead. That's it. Now do it several more times here in the office. At home I'd like you to repeat it about six times with the hands and forearms, and then move on to each of the other areas. Do each one about six times, so that you can really enjoy the difference between tension and relaxation.

Now let's move to your **upper arms**. Leave your hands and forearms relaxed and gently tighten your **biceps and triceps**. As you breathe in with your diaphragm, gently tighten the front and the back of your upper arms. Like this... Not too tight... Pay attention to the tension as you gradually tighten your arms. And then slowly let the tension all go as you slowly exhale. Pay attention to the relaxation as you exhale and let your muscles unwind. Notice how good that feels. Now do it several more times here in the office. Notice how your arms relax more and more each time you gently tighten and then deeply relax along with your breathing. When you do this at home, let yourself tighten and relax five or six times, so you can enjoy and remember the difference between tensing your arms and letting them relax completely.

Now, let's move to the rest of the body, working up from feet to face. We'll just do one group at a time. Once it's nice and relaxed, let it stay relaxed as we move on to other muscle groups. Don't tighten any muscle so much that it hurts. Just tighten enough to feel the tension and to let it relax more deeply with each breath. It's the relaxation we're after. Remember, we'll tighten while inhaling. And, we'll let the tension go while we exhale.

Let's move to the **feet**. You can tighten them by pulling your toes up into the top of your shoes or arching your foot and pushing them down into the sole of your shoe. Try both, and go with the one that feels more relaxed that day. Like this.... Go ahead and do this a few times while breathing in and out easily with your diaphragm.

And now let's move to your **shins**. Lift the front of your feet up while you breathe in. Notice the tension. And, enjoy the relaxation while you exhale and slowly let your shins relax. Like this....

Next, let's do the **calf** muscles. Push the toe of your foot down a little while you breathe in. Let it go as you exhale.

Now let's move to your **knees and thighs**. While you breathe in, tighten your quads in the front and your hamstrings in back and the muscles around your knees. Then, let all the tension go as you breathe out and settle into the chair. If this is hard, you can do it by putting your feet flat on the floor and trying to slide them forward against the floor or

carpet. Be gentle with this one. Remember, the tension isn't important. Focus on the relaxation while you exhale and let it go. Like this....

Now let's do the largest group of muscles in the body, the **buttocks**. Remember, what do we call people who are tense and uptight all the time? Right, there's wisdom in the language. Now, gently tighten your seat while you inhale. And then as you move naturally exhaling, gently relax your seat. Relax and settle back into the chair as you slowly let all the tension go. Like this....

And as you relax more deeply, you might notice that your body begins to feel a nice and heavy, or even a little lighter in places. And you might notice that you're salivating a little more. These are nice signs that you're relaxing more and more. Just notice them with interest.

Now, let's move to the muscles of the **abdomen and lower back**. With this step only you'll have to breathe in first -- and then tighten just before you exhale and relax. You'll feel a pushing down and out into the waist of your pants. And you may notice some pressure into your pelvic floor. And then move to breathing out, and relax your belly and back, like this...

And now let's tighten the abdomen by **pulling your stomach in**... Take a relaxed breath first – and then pull your stomach in toward your spine. Feel the tension for a moment. Notice it.... And then slowly let your air out and relax your stomach. Like this ... Don't tighten too much with this one – just enough to feel the tension and then exhale and notice how good it feels to slowly let all your tension go.

And now the **upper chest and shoulders**.... You can tighten these by gently pulling your arms into your rib cage.... Like this ...

And now the **shoulder blades**... Gently bring your shoulder blades back toward each other. Like this... Feel the tension while you inhale, and then let it all go. Like this... Notice how it feels to tense them together when you inhale. And then enjoy how good it feels to slowly let all the tension go as you exhale.

Now the **upper back and shoulders**.... Gently shrug your shoulders up. Feel the tension as you inhale, and then let it all go. Like this.... That's right. Enjoy the relaxation.

Back of the **neck and traps**.... Tilt your head back against resisting muscles or against the back of a high chair or couch.

**Front of the neck**.... Tuck your chin down. And then relax and bring your head back to neutral. Like this....

**Facial scrunch**. Tighten up your whole face: jaw, mouth, eyes, and forehead. And then as you begin to exhale, let all the tension gradually go. Like this....

Now let's focus on your **Jaw**. Tighten gently as you inhale, and then exhale and relax. To keep a focus, count to three as you inhale; to four as you let it all go. Let your mouth hang open. Look dopey. Richard Nixon's jowls... Like this....

**Tongue**.... Push it into the back of your teeth, and then let it go.

Now **frown** with your eyebrows. Scowl a little. Look an angry. Try to keep the rest of your face relaxed. Then as you exhale, let it all go. Like this....

Finally now arch your **eyebrows up**. Look tense and anxious: like you're surprised or frightened. Then let it all go. Like this.... Enjoy the relaxation.

And now simply enjoy your relaxed body and **scan and review** all the muscle groups in your mind. Breathe easily and enjoy the relaxed sensations throughout your body. Remember, you can do this at any time.

I'd like you to **practice it twice a day**, or **at least once** a day, building up to about 15 to 25 minutes. I think you'll become more aware of muscle tension as it builds up.

And, with practice you'll be able to let your muscles unwind and use this relaxed abdominal breathing and progressive muscle relaxation as one tool in managing the tension that builds up with chronic pain and stress.

But first, just do it when you're already fairly relaxed. Like riding a bike, do it first on easy ground. Then later you can tackle the steep and bumpy trails.

**Next session** we'll take about half an hour working on abdominal breathing and progressive muscle relaxation again. I'm sure you'll have some observations and questions, so **keep track of the things that work well for you**.

And maybe next session we can add some relaxed imagery to the end of the muscle relaxation, so think of a place or a time when you've been really at ease and relaxed so we can draw on that **memory or imagery of relaxation**. When you remember that place, try to recall as many sensations as possible. So breathe, relax, and in your mind.....

- Notice what you see and what you really like and enjoy.
- Notice what relaxing, interesting, or pleasant sounds are around you.
- Enjoy the good smells and aromas that come to you.
- Pay attention to the pleasant sensations you feel on your skin, like warmth, sunlight, grass, or a gentle breeze.
- Maybe get absorbed in a good taste that you recall, like chocolate or fruit.

And, let yourself get absorbed and caught up in these memories as a way of relaxing even more deeply. Have fun with these good memories and images. Pay attention to them. Enjoy them. Give yourself a break from stress... And breathe and relax.