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A Simple Breathing Technique to Reduce Stress and Control Anxiety and Panic Attacks

By Dr. Mercola | December 02, 2016

Controlling anxiety and quelling panic attacks is one of the areas where the Buteyko Method can be quite useful. If you're experiencing anxiety or panic attacks, or if you feel very stressed and your mind can't stop racing, try the following breathing technique. This sequence helps retain and gently accumulate carbon dioxide, leading to calmer breathing, and reduces anxiety. In other words, the urge to breathe will decline as you go into a more relaxed state:

1. Take a small breath into your nose, followed by a small breath out
2. Then hold your nose for five seconds in order to hold your breath, and then release your nose to resume breathing
3. Breathe normally for 10 seconds
4. Repeat the sequence

3 Steps to Proper Breathing

In his talk, McKeown led a group demonstration of proper breathing, summarized as follows. These steps will help your breath to become lighter, such that the hairs in your nose barely move. This type of breathing helps you to enter and remain in a calm, meditative state while lowering your blood pressure and reducing nasal congestion for easier breathing.

You may feel a slight air shortage at first, but this should be tolerable. If it becomes uncomfortable, take a 15-second break and then continue.

- Place one hand on your upper chest and the other on your belly; feel your belly move slightly in and out with each breath, while your chest remains unmoving.
- Close your mouth and breathe in and out through your nose. Focus your attention on the cold air coming into your nose and the slightly warmer air leaving it on the out breath.
- Slowly decrease the volume of each breath, to the point it feels like you're almost not breathing at all (you'll notice your breath getting very quiet at this point). The crucial thing here is to develop a slight air hunger. This simply means there's a slight accumulation of carbon dioxide in your blood, which signals your brain to breathe.

After three or four minutes of air hunger, you'll start experiencing the beneficial effects of CO₂ accumulation, such as an increase in body temperature and an increase in saliva. The former is a sign of improved blood circulation, the latter a sign that your parasympathetic nervous system has been activated, which is important for stress reduction.