STRESS & ANXIETY

Diaphragmatic Breathing Script

Written for therapists, physiotherapists and nurses teaching breathing work in session. Six minutes built around the two-hand check — one hand on the chest, one on the belly, with the chest hand barely moving — and paced so the listener never over-breathes, which is what most deep breathing scripts accidentally coach.

6 min · 6 segments

01. Settling

45 sec

[Settle your own breathing before you begin — whatever pace you read at is the pace they will breathe at. Check beforehand that lying flat is comfortable; semi-reclined or seated works just as well, and is usually better after abdominal surgery, in later pregnancy, or for anyone short of breath lying down.]

Find a position you can stay in comfortably for a few minutes. Lying on your back with your knees bent, or sitting with your back well supported — either one works. Let your shoulders drop, and let your jaw be loose. *[pause for 10 seconds]*

Close your eyes if you would like to. If you would rather keep them open, let your gaze rest on one spot in front of you and soften it. *[pause for 10 seconds]*

Nothing about your breathing needs to change yet. For now, let it carry on exactly as it is. *[pause for 15 seconds]*

02. The two-hand check

1 min

[Give them time to actually place their hands — read the placement line, then wait rather than talking over it. If they tell you both hands are moving, do not correct them. The aim is a smaller chest movement, not a still chest.]

Rest one hand flat on the centre of your chest. Rest the other on your belly, just below your ribs, where your fingers can spread out across it. *[pause for 15 seconds]*

Now simply notice which hand is doing the travelling. Most of us breathe high in the chest for much of the day, so it is often the upper hand that moves. That is not a fault. It is a habit, and habits can shift. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

Over the next few breaths, let the lower hand take on more of the movement. As you breathe in through your nose, let the air arrive low, so the hand on your belly rises gently. The hand on your chest should barely move. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

03. Letting the breath stay small

1 min 15

[This is the segment that stops the exercise turning into over-breathing. Read it slower than the rest, and mean the line about the breath being ordinary — clients hear enthusiasm as an instruction to pull in more air.]

This is not a big breath. It is an ordinary breath, arriving in a different place. If you notice yourself pulling in as much air as you can, ease off. Low and easy is what we are after, not large. *[pause for 15 seconds]*

Let the out-breath be unhurried. Let it leave in its own time, through your nose or softly through your mouth, whichever is more comfortable. *[pause for 15 seconds]*

And at the end of the out-breath, wait a moment. There is no need to reach for the next one. It arrives on its own. *[pause for 25 seconds]*

04. An easy rhythm

1 min 15

[Count at the listener's pace, not your own — watch the belly hand if you can see it. Tingling in the hands or lips, light-headedness or a feeling of not getting enough air are signs of over-breathing: drop the counting, let them breathe normally, and only come back to it once it has passed.]

If you would like a rhythm to follow, try this one. Breathe in for a slow count of four. Two, three, four. And out for a count of six. Two, three, four, five, six. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

If four and six feel like a stretch, shorten them both. Three in, four out. The numbers matter far less than the ease. A breath you have to work at is not the one we want. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

And if at any point you feel light-headed, or a tingling in your hands or lips, let the counting go and breathe however you normally would until it settles. That is a signal to do less, not to try harder. *[pause for 25 seconds]*

05. Resting in it

1 min

[The longest silence in the script sits here. Time it on a clock rather than guessing — talking early is the most common way this one gets spoiled.]

You can let your hands rest wherever they are comfortable now, by your sides or across your belly. Keep the same low, unforced rhythm going, without needing to check on it. *[pause for 40 seconds]*

If your attention wanders off somewhere, that is fine. Bring it back to the rise under your hand, and carry on. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

06. Finishing

45 sec

[Land it. Say the final block at a normal speaking volume and pace — that shift back to an ordinary voice is what tells the body the exercise is over.]

In a moment we will finish. Let your breathing go back to whatever it wants to do. You do not have to hold on to the pattern. *[pause for 10 seconds]*

Bring some movement back into your hands and your feet. Roll your shoulders once. If your eyes are closed, open them and let the room come back into focus. *[pause for 10 seconds]*

That is the whole practice. Two hands, one moving more than the other, and a breath you never have to force. It takes ninety seconds at a desk, and it works just as well there as it does lying down.

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