

Once you've become aware of stress, it's time to relax! There are many techniques for relaxing (and no one method is better than another), but the most basic is deep breathing. One of the body's automatic reactions to stress is rapid, shallow breathing. Breathing slowly and deeply is one of the ways you can "turn off" your stress reaction and "turn on" your relaxation response.

## **The Basic Technique**

Deep breathing is a simple technique that is basic to most other relaxation skills. By inhaling deeply and allowing your lungs to breathe in as much oxygen as possible, you can begin to relieve the tension that can lead to negative stress. And, best of all, deep breathing can be done anywhere and at any time. Try to practice deep breathing for a few minutes three or four times a day, or whenever you begin to feel tense.

### **Inhale**

Sit or stand (using good posture) and place your hands firmly and comfortably on your stomach. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose, letting your stomach expand as much as possible. Many people are "backward breathers"—they tend to tighten their stomachs when breathing in. By placing your hands on your stomach, you can actually feel when you are breathing properly. When you've breathed in as much as possible, hold your breath for a few seconds before exhaling.



### **Exhale**

With your hands on your stomach, exhale slowly through your mouth, pursing your lips as if you were going to whistle. By pursing your lips, you can control how fast you exhale and keep your airways open as long as possible. As you exhale, your stomach deflates, while the large muscle under your lungs (the diaphragm) expands. When your lungs feel "empty," begin the inhale—exhale cycle again. Try to repeat this cycle three or four times at each session.

