

# Stress buster

February 13 2017, by James Porter

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

(HealthDay)—The same system that activates the stress response in your body—the autonomic nervous system—also regulates other functions, including heart rate, blood pressure and breathing rate. But unlike most autonomic functions, which are hard or impossible to control, you can easily take control of your breathing.

When you're stressed, your [breathing](#) tends to become quick and shallow. So reminding yourself to breathe *slowly and deeply* makes this

the perfect tool for self-regulating your nervous system and lowering your levels of stress.

Here are four [breathing exercises](#) you can learn and do in just minutes:

1. **Abdominal breathing.** Put one hand over your belly. When you breathe air in right down to the abdomen, you'll notice your hand rise on the in-breath and fall on the out-breath. You can even gently push down on your belly on the out-breath, forcing the last bit of air out of your lungs.

2. **Breathing to a certain count.** Breathe in to a count of any number from 3 to 6. Hold it to a count of the same number you just chose, then breathe out to a slightly longer count. Pick a number that feels right for your [lung](#) capacity.

3. **3-part deep breathing.** Start by breathing in deeply and then expelling all the air out of your lungs. Now, with your next breath, imagine filling up the lower portions of your lungs with air first, then the chest, and finish by filling the very top of your lungs with air. When done correctly, this will almost feel like your lungs are massaging your upper back and shoulders from the inside out.

4. **Ocean breathing.** Close off the back of your throat as if you were breathing in through a straw. When you do this right, you should hear a very slight hissing sound as you breathe in and breathe out. This exercise should be done with the mouth closed, inhaling and exhaling through your nose. Some people say this hissing sound in the back of your throat sounds like waves rolling up on a beach, thus the name "ocean breathing."

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Citation: Stress buster (2017, February 13) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-02-stress-buster.html>

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