



COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE STRESS RESPONSE: FEELINGS AND BREATHING TECHNIQUES

The COVID-19 pandemic causes so many of us to cycle through the stress response designed to protect us from threat. To survive, your brain's limbic system, including the amygdala, shuts down the thinking part of your brain and automatically responds in the moment. It chooses a fight, flight, freeze or fawn response based on what helped you survive in the past. Because a pandemic is not a stress recognized by the survival system, we cycle through the different responses, bringing about a variety of feelings and reactions.

Some feelings you may be experiencing:



FEAR AND ANXIETY



SADNESS OR GRIEF



HOPELESSNESS OR DEPRESSION



DENIAL



SHAME



APATHY OR NUMBNESS



ANGER



CALM



EXHAUSTION



GRATITUDE

No matter what you're feeling right now, your feelings are valid and serve a purpose. The COVID-19 pandemic is not business as usual, so be gentle with yourself.

BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Take a deep breath in. Now let it out. You may notice a difference in how you feel already. Your breath is a powerful tool to ease stress and make you feel less anxious.

If we can control our breathing and take a moment to notice the sounds around us, our brain will receive the message we are safe in this moment and begin to come out of survival mode and back into connection/thinking mode. The more we do this, the stronger this reaction will be and more grounded we can feel through this pandemic.

Try the following techniques:

DEEP BREATHING

Most people take short, shallow breaths into their chest. It can make you feel anxious and zap your energy. With this technique, you'll learn how to take bigger breaths, all the way into your belly.

1. Get comfortable. You can lie on your back in bed or on the floor with a pillow under your head and knees. Or you can sit in a chair with your shoulders, head, and neck supported against the back of the chair.
2. Breathe in through your nose. Let your belly fill with air.
3. Breathe out through your nose.
4. Place one hand on your belly. Place the other hand on your chest.
5. As you breathe in, feel your belly rise. As you breathe out, feel your belly lower. The hand on your belly should move more than the one that's on your chest.
6. Take three more full, deep breaths. Breathe fully into your belly as it rises and falls with your breath.

EQUAL TIME FOR BREATHING IN AND BREATHING OUT

In this exercise, you'll match how long you breathe in with how long you breathe out. Over time, you'll increase how long you're able to breathe in and out at a time.

1. Sit comfortably on the floor or in a chair.
2. Breathe in through your nose. As you do it, count to five.
3. Breathe out through your nose to the count of five.
4. Repeat several times.

Once you feel comfortable with breaths that last five counts, increase how long you breathe in and breathe out. You can work up to breaths that last up to 10 counts.

MODIFIED LION'S BREATH

As you do this exercise, imagine that you're a lion. Let all of your breath out with a big, open mouth.

1. Sit comfortably on the floor or in a chair.
2. Breathe in through your nose. Fill your belly all the way up with air.
3. When you can't breathe in any more, open your mouth as wide as you can. Breathe out with a "HA" sound.
4. Repeat several times.