

# Breathing Reduces Stress, Improves Productivity

By Robert Selders, Jr.

Breathing is essential to living. Yet most of us rarely pay attention to how we breathe, and how our breathing affects our health. That's especially true of small business owners and their employees who are focused on day-to-day operations rather than second-by-second breaths. If you run a small business, there are plenty of compelling reasons to practice better breathing techniques for yourself and for the people who work for you.

Simply put, better breathing promotes better health. Research has shown that adopting healthy breathing patterns can help strengthen your immune system, which in turn helps you fight off colds and other ailments that lead to sick days and lost productivity. Proper breathing techniques have also been shown to help relieve tension, stress, and anxiety that can have a negative effect on mental as well as physical health. People who know how to breathe effectively additionally experience greater focus and clarity of mind, allowing them to concentrate on their tasks for longer periods of time and learn new skills more quickly. What's more, healthy breathing practices can improve blood circulation and oxygen flow to vital organs, including your brain and heart, resulting in higher levels of energy.

The list of benefits goes on. And all these benefits have a direct and positive impact on your workplace performance. But just how do you incorporate healthy breathing into your business environment so you can reap the benefits? Learning healthy, effective breathing techniques takes some time and practice, but it is well worth the investment. The following steps to diaphragmatic breathing will help you get started on the path to better breathing for a healthier, stress-free, more productive workplace and workforce.

Diaphragmatic breathing is easy to do and very relaxing. It's best to start here if you have never done breathing exercises before. Anytime you need to relax or get relief from a stressful situation, try this:

1. Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor or lie flat on your back in a comfortable position (knees bent and feet flat on the floor).
2. Put one hand on your abdomen just below your ribs and the other hand on your chest.
3. Take a deep breath in (inhale) through your nose, and allow your abdomen to expand, pushing your hand outward. Your chest should not move.
4. Breathe out (exhale) through pursed lips, as if you were whistling, at or slower than your normal rate. Feel your abdomen contract inward, and use your hand to help expel all the air.
5. Practice this technique at least three (3) times per day for 8 to 10 times. Take your time with each breath - slowly inhaling and exhaling with each breath you take.
6. Pay attention to how you feel at the end of your breathing time.

NOTE: You may get a little dizzy when you try this breathing method the first few times. If you begin to breathe too fast or feel lightheaded, slow your breathing. Make sure to get up slowly from your breathing position.

Proper breathing is a foundational concept that yields high and quick returns in both your physical and business health. Practice often and witness your personal and organizational vitality soar!

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