

Deep breathing exercise:

- If possible, find a quiet place that you can stay in for 3-5 minutes, or put on headphones with calming music (nature sounds, waterfalls, classical music, etc. Music without words usually works better for this exercise)
- Sit or lie in a comfortable position, a position you can stay in without needing to move much or at all for 2-3 minutes.
 - If you are sitting, try to sit with your back straight and with both feet on the floor; rest your hands unfolded in your lap or on the arms of your chair
 - If you are lying down, lie flat on your back with your legs straight and fully extended; rest your arms, flat at each side or place them unfolded on the top of your thigh/hips or flat on your stomach.
- If you are comfortable to close your eyes, close your eyes.
 - If you prefer to keep your eyes open, that is totally ok! Find a stationary object to focus on (something that is not moving like a pen on the table or a crack on the wall).
- Once you are in a comfortable position, that you can maintain without movement for 2-3 minutes, take a few deep breaths through your nose, completely fill your chest cavity and hold that breath for 1-2 seconds, then exhale SLOWLY through your mouth.
 - While taking these deep breaths, go ahead and lift your shoulders up while you breathe in and completely relax them when you exhale out. (this will help release any built up stress in your neck and shoulders)
- After 2-3 deep breaths, turn your focus completely to your breathing, letting go of any worry thoughts, “to-do” lists, or negative thinking in your mind (ie: thinking “I should be able to afford that at my age”, “I don’t know how I’m going to make it to work on time without a car”, “I hate her, she is a horrible person!”). Letting go of these thoughts is NOT easy, and it takes a lot of practice to replace the negativity and worry with positivity and hope, so don’t beat yourself up when you find your mind wandering a lot during this exercise. It is completely “normal” to have trouble focusing when you first start practicing this exercise, and most people find they catch themselves “drifting” back to worry thoughts several times during a 1-2 minute breathing exercise.

Now, you’re probably wondering “How do I focus on my breathing?” huh? 😊

To help keep your focus on your breathing, try one of the following:

Counting-

It is helpful to have a set number to count to (like 10 or 15), and when you reach that set number you return to 1. The key is to use counting to help control, focus and SLOW your breathing. So, to help us to that, count slowly with every breath. (ie: on the in breath, think to yourself ONE, on the out breath, think to yourself TWO, and so on)

Spelling-

Just like counting, spelling while breathing can be used to help SLOW your breathing and distract your mind from focusing on worry thoughts that are increasing your anxiety or depression. So, just like counting, we are going to spell slowly with every breath. I recommend using your name (ie: my name is ALISON, so on the in breath, I would think to myself "A", on the out breath, I would think to myself "L", and so on).

As you're either counting or spelling, it is to be expected that you will have thoughts popping into your head. These thoughts may be benign, such as: "I have to remember to pick up milk." Or they may be very judgmental or worrisome, such as: "I am so stupid; how am I going to afford this?" It doesn't necessarily matter what type of thoughts pop in while we are trying to focus on our breathing, the point is to "push" those thoughts away temporarily so that we can clear and calm our minds in order to be more effective with everyday tasks, such as: calling the doctor, helping our children with the homework or talking to our significant other about something important. When those thoughts pop in, gently acknowledge them, tell yourself it's ok to have them and bring your attention back to your breathing/counting/spelling. ie: You can say to yourself something like: "Ok. That's a worry thought, I don't have to think about that right now. Right now I am counting and I can think about it when I am done if I need to" and resume your counting; or, "No. I am not stupid, I feel bad about what I said and right now, I am going to focus on my breathing; I can think about that later if I need to" and resume your breathing exercise.