



MELBOURNE

Pregnancy &
Pelvic Physio

Breathing to support the nervous system

As well as Diaphragmatic Breathing, there are other breathing techniques we can use to relax our nervous system, helping us to move out of 'fight or flight' autonomic activation and into a more relaxed 'rest and digest' body state.

- When we experience stress, our nervous system helps us to be ready to respond to any threat by releasing hormones to speed up our breathing pattern and hold our muscles tense (such as the jaw or neck, or pelvic floor). This can be very useful if we are running away from an attacker or dealing with an acute stress, but can become a problem if we are constantly stuck on high alert with our nervous system even after the acute stress has passed. By learning to change some of these body signs and lean into a more relaxed state, we are able to show our nervous system that we are indeed safe, and can relax

1. Relaxed Body Breathing

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position
- Begin to inhale slowly and deeply through your nose for a count of 5, feeling your jaw, shoulders and body relax
- Exhale slowly through your nose to the same count of 5, feeling the body continue to relax
- You can slowly scan from head to toe, relaxing any areas of tension as you become aware of them in the body
- Repeat this pattern of gentle, slow breathing for 1-2 mins, focusing on releasing and relaxing muscles with each exhale
- Check in with your body again and see how you feel

2. Deep Belly Breathing

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position
- Place your hands on your belly and begin to slowly and deeply inhale, sending the breath all the way down into your belly, and feeling the abdominal wall expanding forwards into your hands with your inhale
- Exhale slowly through your nose, feeling the air leave and your belly deflate under your hands
- Repeat this pattern for 1-2 mins
- Check in with your body again and see how you feel

3. Box Breathing

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position, ensuring your feet are grounded into the floor/supported
- Place one hand on belly, one hand on ribcage/chest
- Do a nice slow inhale for 4 seconds feeling both belly and chest expand outwards into your hands
- Hold the inhale for 4 seconds, then slowly exhale over 4-8 seconds
- Wait at least 4 seconds before your next inhale
- Repeat this pattern for 1-2 mins
- Check in with your body again and see how you feel

NB: If you have suffered from trauma of any kind, some of these techniques may feel very challenging to begin. Begin at your own pace, and if it feels too confronting then it might be best to be guided into nervous system relaxation by a qualified mental health practitioner such as a Trauma Informed Psychologist