



Deep Breathing to Reduce Stress

Vivian Plummer, PTA
Physical Therapist Assistant
Andover Physical Therapy

These days it is not hard to find someone that is stressed out! Changes in these economic times are affecting us and our bodies. Changes in our bodies usually constitute a flight or fight response, however, when we are in a perpetually stressed state our bodies have a hard time finding that balance again. Although proper breathing is not the cure all, it will help to reduce some of our stressors. Have you ever paid attention to the way you breathe? Most of us are “chest breathers,” lifting our shoulders up to get a breath, and as our stress increases our breaths get more shallow and do not allow the equal exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide.

The best way to breathe is called diaphragmatic breathing. In other words, using our diaphragm to bring air into our lungs and to help push the air out. If your abdomen gently moves in and out when you breathe you are breathing correctly.

Here are a few tips on how to breathe properly and reduce stress: Lay on the floor with your legs stretched out. Place one hand on your chest and one on your stomach. Without trying to change your normal breathing pay attention to which hand raises the most as you inhale. If your chest is moving more than your abdomen you are breathing from your chest. Now breathe through your nose and allow your abdomen to rise. This is caused by the diaphragm pushing your abdomen out to make more room for air. As you exhale through your mouth, push your abdomen in allowing your lungs to empty. Your breaths should be slow, even and gentle. Notice your breathing slowing down, your body relaxing and your mind claming as you practice your breathing. Doing this a few times a day in a quiet spot for 5-10 minutes will make a big difference. It takes practice and time so don't be discouraged. You will soon find yourself in stressful situations thinking about breathing properly and helping reduce those stressors.