



# Deep Breathing

Parent - Family Newsletter



## Deep Breathing: One Simple Step to Banishing Stress

**Let's face it: Life can be stressful.** From going to work every day to putting a healthy meal on the table every night to arguing with your teenager about curfew, life is full of stressful situations.

**IN TIME**, stress can have some serious consequences, including depression, alcohol and drug use, and poor work or school performance. It could also be one of the causes of childhood obesity: A 2009 Iowa State

University study found that kids who were stressed were more likely to become obese.

The bad news is most of us don't know how to relax, says Stacey Lazos, a health education coordinator at

HealthTeacher. Luckily, relaxation can be learned, and it could be

the key to creating a calmer life for you and your family.

There are many ways to relax, but there's probably no simpler—or cheaper—way than deep abdominal breathing. Lazos says the time you and your family spend practicing deep abdominal breathing will yield physical, mental and emotional dividends. What's more, she says, if you and your family practice often, it will become a tool that you can use to calm yourselves even in very stressful situations.



### The Science of Relaxation

**H**ow can a few deep inhales and exhales calm you down? By positively affecting the calming ability of the nervous system, according to Dr. Emily Coe, HealthTeacher's director of behavioral science. "Deep breathing triggers the relaxation response, resulting in improved mood and physiologic function," she says. Specific outcomes include improved attention, positive emotions, and improved anger management.

# How to Practice Deep Breathing

Gather your family members and lead them through this deep abdominal breathing exercise. In a calm, relaxed voice, tell your family members to do the following:



- Sit up straight in your chair (or on the floor). Lengthen your spine, or your backbone, keeping your feet on the floor and relaxing your shoulders. It may be easier to learn this technique lying down. When your child is lying down, place a small stuffed animal just below their belly button and ask them to move it with their breath.
- Place your hands in your lap, with your right hand on top of your left and your thumbs touching.

- Breathe in and out through your nose.
- Each time you inhale, try to make your belly inflate like a balloon.

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- Each time you exhale, imagine the balloon deflating.
- Notice if you are breathing into the top of your chest. If so, try to relax your diaphragm just below your rib cage, or the bones in your chest, and expand your belly.
- Make sure you are using your breath to expand your belly, not your muscles.

Practice makes perfect, so carve out some time every day to improve your technique. ALL YOU NEED IS A FEW MINUTES!

## When to Use Deep Abdominal Breathing

Think about a typical day in your household from the moment you wake up until you turn the lights out and say goodnight. Where is there potential for stress? Or where is there a need to relax? Use deep abdominal breathing to de-stress in the following situations:

- Rushing to get ready in the morning
- Arguing with a family member
- Riding a crowded, noisy bus
- Paying the bills
- Cramming for a test or preparing for a meeting
- Worrying about a relationship
- Dealing with a picky eater

