

# Breaking the Anxiety Cycle

Adapted from “Minding The Body, Mending The Mind” - Joan Borynsenko, Ph.D

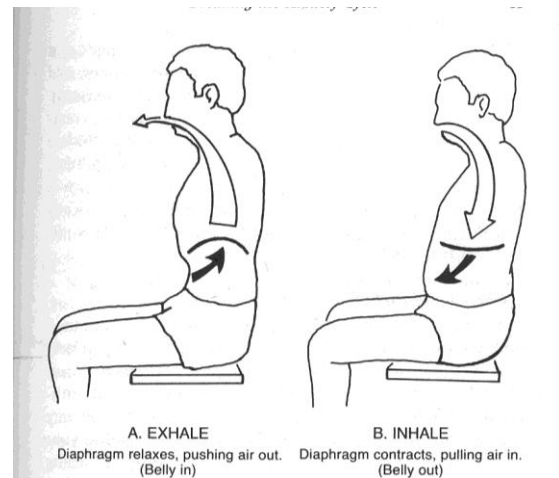
## CYCLE BREAKER #1 – ABDOMINAL BREATHING

### 1) Breathing awareness:

Sit in a straight-backed chair and then slide forward a few inches so that you are reclining slightly. You can put a small pillow behind your back if preferred. Close your eyes, and concentrate on the in-flow and out-flow of air through your nostrils.

### 2) Shift from chest breathing to abdominal breathing

First, take a deep breath in and then blow it out completely through your mouth, with an audible sigh of relief. Then, continue with abdominal breathing through your nose.



### 3) Ten-to-One Countdown

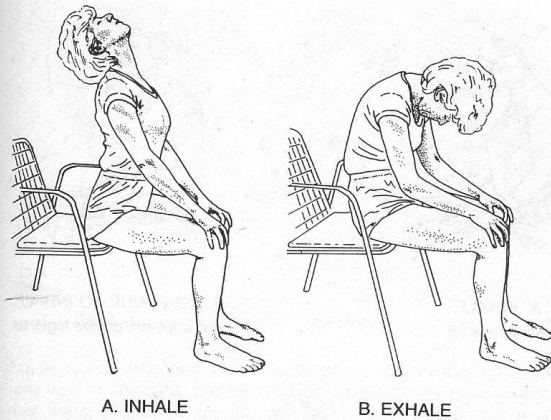
As you breathe out, silently repeat *ten*, letting go of tension as if it were a wave moving from your head down your body, and out through the soles of your feet. Visualize the feeling of letting go. On the next breath, repeat the technique, counting *nine*. Notice how your breathing has slowed down, a sign of relaxation response.

When you **make the time** to practice on a regular basis, you will become more proficient. Your nervous system will become conditioned to a state of relaxation, and may be able to lead you into restful meditation in much less time.

## CYCLE BREAKER #2 – STRETCHING

This series is composed of four exercises followed by the Ten-to-One Countdown breathing exercise. It is designed to relax tension as quickly and efficiently as possible in the **major areas that people store tension: back, shoulders, neck and face**. Tense up on inhalation, and let go of tension on exhalation. Visualize the tightness and stress flow away as you breathe out.

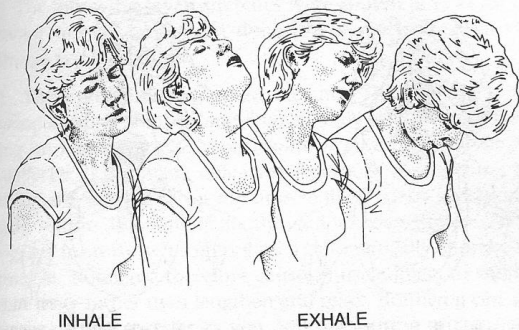
**EXERCISE 1: THE BACK RELAXER**



**A. INHALE**                      **B. EXHALE**

Move to the edge of your chair. With eyes closed so that you can pay closer attention to inner sensations, notice how your back feels. On the next in breath, arch backward (A), stretching your spine only as far as feels comfortable. Exhale and round your back (B), rolling your shoulders forward and letting go. Repeat three times, keeping full attention on breathing, stretching, and letting go (long pause).

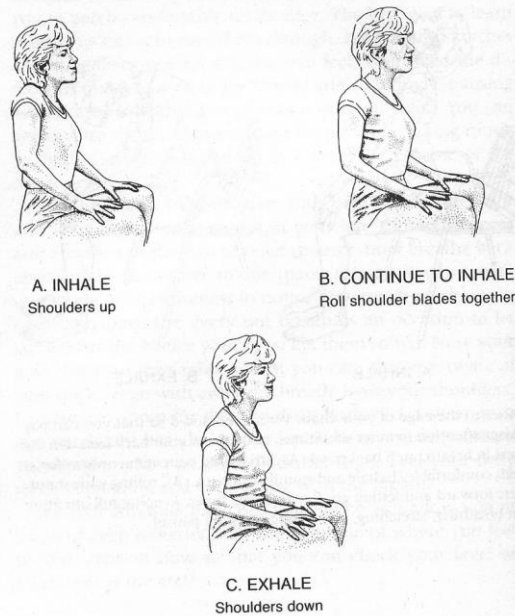
**EXERCISE 3: HEAD ROLLS**



**INHALE**                      **EXHALE**

Exhale as you drop your chin to your chest. Now inhale and rotate your head to the right, just letting it go, letting gravity take it rather than trying to push it around. When you have rotated your head around to the back, begin to exhale. Continue the exhalation as you roll to the left and back down to the chest. Now you're ready to inhale and start over. Complete three rolls to the right and then reverse, three to the left. Notice how the stretch moves around your neck as you do this? For instance, when you have dropped your head to the right, you can feel the stretch on the left side of your neck; when your head drops back, the stretch moves to your throat, and so on all the way around. Try to be aware of where you feel the stretch rather than where you are moving your head (long pause).

**EXERCISE 2: SHOULDER SHRUGS**



**A. INHALE**  
Shoulders up

**B. CONTINUE TO INHALE**  
Roll shoulder blades together

**C. EXHALE**  
Shoulders down

Inhale and pull your shoulders up to your ears, (A). Now rotate your shoulders backward, pulling the shoulder blades together (B). Exhale with a sigh and let go (C). Repeat three times (long pause). Notice that when you pull your shoulder blades together, you are giving the chest muscles a nice stretch.

**EXERCISE 4: FACE EXERCISES**



**A. THE SCRUNCH**  
Inhale. Hold. Then exhale and let go.

**B. THE YAWN**  
Inhale. Hold. Then exhale and let go.

The facial exercises are done in two steps. First, inhale and scrunch all your facial muscles in toward the center (A). It's as if you are trying to squeeze all the tension right off the tip of your nose. Exhale and let it go. Now inhale and open your mouth wide, lifting your eyebrows to make your face very long (B). This is like a yawn. When you exhale and let go, you may even find yourself yawning.

**Keep a log of your breathing and stretching exercises**

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