

The Importance of Breathing by Joyce Leonard

Yes, I know we all breathe, usually without even thinking about it. But have you ever noticed HOW you're breathing? When we get stressed or anxious, we tend to breathe shallowly – in our upper chest. This signals the body to be on high alert – something is up. Then all sorts of biological functions are activated and our body goes into flight or fight mode. We get even more stressed or anxious, we lose our bearings, and our thinking gets muddled.

If we can teach ourselves to breathe into our belly, like newborns do, then we can reduce our stress and anxiety. When we take a breath all the way down into our belly, it signals to our body that all is okay. Our body then can go about its business of digestion, repair, and relaxation. We stay centered and grounded and our thinking is clearer.

Try this now: breathe in, and let your chest and belly rise. It doesn't have to be a huge breath – a normal one will do. Let those stomach muscles relax and expand on the in-breath. Do this a few times and notice how quickly you start to relax. You can do this anytime – in the middle of a conversation that is heating up, in traffic when you are getting frustrated or angry, while waiting in line at the store, or when you get that notice that a bill is overdue. It's not important just to breathe, but to breathe all the way down into the belly to relax our mind and our body, enabling us to get our bearings and think more clearly. Practice this over and over until it becomes automatic and see how much more calm you become.