



Guide to Breathing Exercises for Emotional Dysregulation and Anxiety in Individuals with ADHD

Emotional dysregulation and anxiety are common challenges faced by individuals with ADHD. Breathing exercises can be an effective tool to help manage these symptoms by promoting relaxation, increasing focus, and reducing stress. This guide outlines several breathing exercises that are particularly beneficial for individuals with ADHD.

1. Understanding the Benefits of Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises can help:

- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Improve focus and attention
- Enhance emotional regulation
- Promote overall well-being

2. General Tips for Practicing Breathing Exercises

- Find a quiet, comfortable place where you won't be disturbed.
- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
- Close your eyes to minimise distractions.
- Focus on your breath and the sensation of air entering and leaving your body.
- Practice regularly to gain the most benefit.

3. Breathing Exercises

a) Diaphragmatic Breathing (Belly Breathing)

Purpose: To engage the diaphragm, promote relaxation, and reduce stress.

Instructions:

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
2. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly.
3. Inhale deeply through your nose, allowing your belly to rise while keeping your chest relatively still.
4. Exhale slowly through your mouth, feeling your belly fall.
5. Repeat for 5-10 minutes, focusing on the rise and fall of your belly.

Tips:

- Try to make your exhale longer than your inhale (e.g., inhale for 4 seconds, exhale for 6 seconds).
- Use this exercise when feeling anxious or overwhelmed.

b) 4-7-8 Breathing

Purpose: To calm the mind and body, helping to reduce anxiety and promote sleep.

Instructions:

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes and inhale quietly through your nose for a count of 4.
3. Hold your breath for a count of 7.
4. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound, for a count of 8.
5. Repeat the cycle 4 times, gradually increasing the number of cycles as you become more comfortable with the exercise.

Tips:

- Practice this exercise twice a day for best results.
- Use it before bedtime to help with falling asleep.

c) Box Breathing (Square Breathing)

Purpose: To enhance focus and concentration while reducing stress.

Instructions:

1. Sit in a comfortable position with your back straight.
2. Inhale through your nose for a count of 4.
3. Hold your breath for a count of 4.
4. Exhale through your mouth for a count of 4.
5. Hold your breath for a count of 4.
6. Repeat the cycle for 5-10 minutes.

Tips:

- Visualise a square as you breathe: inhale along one side, hold along the next, exhale along the third side, and hold along the fourth.
- Use this technique before or during tasks that require concentration.



d) Alternate Nostril Breathing (Nadi Shodhana)

Purpose: To balance the mind, reduce anxiety, and enhance emotional regulation.

Instructions:

1. Sit in a comfortable position with your spine straight.
2. Use your right thumb to close your right nostril.
3. Inhale deeply through your left nostril.
4. Close your left nostril with your right ring finger, and release your right nostril.
5. Exhale through your right nostril.
6. Inhale deeply through your right nostril.
7. Close your right nostril with your right thumb, and release your left nostril.
8. Exhale through your left nostril.
9. Repeat the cycle for 5-10 minutes.

Tips:

- Keep your breath slow and steady throughout the exercise.
- Practice this exercise to calm your mind before stressful situations.

e) 5-5-5 Breathing

Purpose: To quickly reduce stress and anxiety.

Instructions:

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
2. Inhale deeply through your nose for a count of 5.
3. Hold your breath for a count of 5.
4. Exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of 5.
5. Repeat the cycle for 5 minutes.

Tips:

- Use this exercise when you need a quick way to calm down.
- Focus on the counting to keep your mind from wandering.



4. Incorporating Breathing Exercises into Daily Routine

- Morning Routine: Start your day with a few minutes of diaphragmatic breathing to set a calm tone for the day.
- Midday Break: Use box breathing or 5-5-5 breathing during breaks to refresh and refocus.
- Evening Routine: Practice 4-7-8 breathing or alternate nostril breathing to unwind and prepare for sleep.
- In-the-Moment: Whenever you feel overwhelmed or anxious, take a few moments to practice any of these exercises to regain composure.

5. Additional Tips

- Consistency: Practice daily for at least a few minutes to build a habit.
- Mindfulness: Pair breathing exercises with mindfulness practices to enhance their effectiveness.
- Environment: Create a calming environment with soft lighting, soothing sounds, or essential oils.
- Support: Consider working with a coach or therapist to explore additional techniques and personalised strategies.

Conclusion

Breathing exercises are a simple yet powerful tool to help manage emotional dysregulation and anxiety in individuals with ADHD. By incorporating these exercises into your daily routine, you can develop greater emotional control, reduce stress, and enhance overall well-being. Remember to try to practice regularly and be patient with yourself as you learn to master these techniques.