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## **Relaxation Response Exercise I**

### **Abdominal Breathing Exercise**

- Practice this exercise for a minimum of five minutes a day, preferably at the same time each day so you are able to get into a regular routine, such as on awakening, going to bed or before meal time (preferably not immediately after a meal when you are still digesting your food as food digestion may disrupt deep relaxation states).
- Inhale slowly, smoothly and deeply through your nose into the bottom of your lungs (sending the air as low as you can).
- When you've taken in a full breath pause for a moment, and then exhale slowly and fully through your nose or mouth (which ever you feel most comfortable doing), allowing your whole body to "let go"(Try visualizing your arms and legs going loose like a rag doll).
- Ideally, you should inhale for about four seconds and exhale for about four seconds for each breath, with a brief pause in between (i.e. avoid gulping in a big breath quickly and expelling your breath all at once).
- If you start to feel light-headed while doing this exercise, stop for 15-20 seconds before resuming.
- You can close your eyes while doing this to make it more relaxing (but obviously not when you are not driving or operating machinery), and augment the exercise by playing quiet relaxing music.
- You may increase the calming effect by imagining a word in your mind such as "relax", "calm" "release" or "let go" as you exhale.
- Feel free to do this exercise more frequently at times when you are feeling anxiety or stress coming on.
- If you find your self distracted by your mind/thoughts while doing this, just accept your thoughts, and return to concentrating on the breath.
- Try to become more aware through the week of when you are breathing shallowly at the chest level, and the intensity of your anxiety state. Shallow chest level breathing is generally associated with more anxiety, and deep abdominal breathing may relieve this through the relaxation response.