

## **Why Controlled Breathing Helps**

Healthy breathing occurs when there is a healthy balance between the oxygen we breathe in and the carbon dioxide we breathe out. When people are anxious they tend to breathe faster or harder than normal and hyperventilate which upsets this balance by causing you to exhale more than you inhale

Normally there is a delicate balance between Oxygen and Carbon Dioxide in the brain. Subtle changes can offset this balance and result in unpleasant symptoms including:

- Tingling face, hands or limbs;
- Muscle tremors or cramps;
- Dizziness and visual problems;
- Difficulty breathing; gasping for air
- Exhaustion and feelings of fatigue; and
- Chest and stomach pains.



Controlled breathing is one way to counteract the symptoms of incorrect breathing and involves learning to breathe gently and evenly, through your nose, filling your lungs completely and then exhaling slowly and fully. Controlled breathing may not be the answer for everyone, but it is an easy 'go to' strategy and if practiced regularly can help you revert back to healthy breathing.

## **How to breathe in a controlled way**

Use your lungs fully and avoid breathing from your upper chest alone. Breathing should be a smooth action, without any gulping or gasping. When you first practice, it can be easier to do this exercise lying down, so that you can better feel the difference between shallow and deep breathing. As you become more practised, you can try this exercise sitting or standing.

- Place one hand on your chest and one on your stomach.
- As you breathe in through your nose, allow your stomach to swell. Count 1-2-3-4. This will mean that you are using your lungs fully. Try to keep the movement in your upper chest to a minimum and keep the movement gentle.
- Slowly and evenly, breathe out through your nose Count 1-2-3-4-5-6-7. (there needs to be more out-breath than in-breath).
- Repeat this, trying to get a rhythm going. You are aiming to take eight to twelve breaths a minute: breathing in and breathing out again counts as one breath. This might be difficult to gauge at first, so practice counting five to seven seconds for a complete breathing cycle (breathing in and out).