



AN “INSTANT” RELAXATION EXERCISE

This exercise is adapted from the book by G.S. Everly, Jr. (1989) *A Clinical Guide to the Treatment of the Human Stress Response*. NY: Plenum Press.

At times we find ourselves overexcited, angry, or just needing to calm down. This simple breathing exercise may be a valuable tool for reducing excessive arousal quickly and effectively during upsetting moments, in effect, a quick way to “calm down” in the face of a stressful situation.

The basic mechanism for stress reduction in this exercise involves deep breathing. The procedure is as follows:

STEP 1- Assume a comfortable position. Rest your left hand (palm down) on top of your navel. Now place your right hand so that it comfortably rests on your left. Your eyes should remain open.

STEP 2- Imagine a hollow bottle, or pouch, lying internally beneath the point at which your hands are resting. Begin to inhale, imagine that the air is entering through your nose and descending to fill that internal pouch. Your hands will rise as you fill the pouch with air. As you continue to inhale, imagine the pouch being filled to the top. Your rib cage and upper chest will continue the wavelike rise that was begun at your navel. The total length of your inhalation should be 3 seconds for the first week or so, then lengthen to 4 to 5 seconds as your progress in skill development.

STEP 3- Slowly begin to exhale-to empty the pouch. As you do, repeat to yourself the phrase “My body is calm”. As you exhale, you will feel your raised abdomen and chest recede.

Repeat this exercise two times in succession. Then continue to breathe normally for 5 to 10 successive breath cycles but be sure to emphasize the expiration of each breath as the point of relaxation. Then you may repeat the entire process again- 2 deep breaths followed by 5 to 10 normal breaths during which you concentrate on releasing any stored tension on the expiration. Should you begin to feel light-headed or should you experience any discomfort, stop at that point. You may wish to shorten the length of the inhalation to avoid light-headedness.

After about one week of practicing, omit STEP 1, start with STEP 2. If you have any health concerns, consult your physician prior to using this exercise. **NEVER** use this exercise while driving.