

## Breathing to Reduce Stress

Shallow breathing may lead to tension and fatigue. Breathing with your diaphragm tends to reduce stress and improve energy.

*Abdominal breathing*, also known as *diaphragmatic breathing*, is a powerful way to decrease stress by activating relaxation centers in the brain. The abdominal expansion causes negative pressure to pull blood into the chest, improving the venous flow of blood back to the heart.

- Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down, with your feet slightly apart, one hand on your abdomen near the navel, and the other hand on your chest.
- Gently exhale the air in your lungs through your mouth, then inhale slowly through your nose to the count of 4, pushing out your abdomen slightly and concentrating on your breath. As you breathe in, imagine warm air flowing all over your body. Hold the breath for a count of at least 4 but not more than 7.
- Slowly exhale through your mouth while counting to 8. Gently contract your abdominal muscles to completely release the remaining air in the lungs.
- Repeat until you feel deeply relaxed for a total of 5 cycles. You may be able to do only 1 or 2 cycles at first.
- Once you feel comfortable with your ability to breathe into the abdomen, it is not necessary to use your hands on your abdomen and chest.

There may be an added benefit of lowering blood pressure when you place your tongue on the ridge of the roof of your mouth, just behind your teeth.