

S P E A K E A S Y



BREATH CONTROL

The Key to Calm
in High Stress Situations

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The Key to Calm in High Stress Situations

You can last weeks without eating, days without water and only minutes without breath. We all know this directly or intuitively. Breathing keeps us alive, energizes our bodies and enables us to challenge the boundaries of human achievement. **Breath is also critically important to our ability to communicate** with our families, peers, and colleagues and in our professional lives.



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Breath is at the foundation of self-control, both physically and mentally.

It is the fuel that enables us to produce voice and interact in person and on the phone. All this we know. What a lot of people are not aware of is exactly how breathing affords and supports our interactive abilities. ⁽¹⁾

Essentially breathing is intertwined with our arousal, (fight or flight) and our de-arousal, (relaxation) systems. We have two parts of our nervous system that influence both fundamental human processes. ⁽²⁾



When we are stressed, tensed up, threatened, either over time or suddenly, our breathing changes significantly: tensions build up in the upper chest,



shoulders, neck and throat regions. Our breathing becomes “centered “ in our upper torso. **Our breathing enters a circular “loop“** between the situation, our perception, and our mental and physical states. Our bodies gear up, through an

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adrenaline cascade, to fight or flee. ⁽²⁾ Our breathing accelerates and becomes more frequent, shallow, and higher up in our torso and results in heavy breathing - all to gather more air for the exertion ahead. **This continues until the threat passes or the reaction is exhausted. The situation is now “in charge.” We are “out of control.”**

Now, imagine yourself relaxed and in a comfortable situation.

Your breathing has slowed, into abdominal breathing

where the stomach or abdomen “balloons “ on the inhale and recedes on the exhale. Heart rate slows, blood pressure drops, muscles become relaxed or loose, tension drops to only what is necessary to keep us awake and alert. **This is the opposite of flight or fight and is called the Relaxation**



CONTROL

Response. ⁽²⁾ **This is natural, normal breathing and should be our goal even in high stress situations.**



Consider you are having to meet with senior executives to request approval

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for a project budget. If you feel the social threat or risk, your body and mind can react with a partial fight or flight response that prevents you from being calm, confident, present and focused. You feel out of control and exhaust yourself in a mental fight. You struggle to stay on track as the tension rises and your focus wobbles. **All you want to do is “get through it “ and you’ve now become your own worst enemy, sabotaging your own best intentions.**

If we breathe normally and naturally when we are comfortable, then we should breathe this way on purpose in order to be comfortable.



Practicing this way of breathing and relaxing on our own will guarantee its usefulness when the chips are down. This means developing breath control and make it a reliable “skill “ you can use whenever and wherever you need or want. With practice, breath control will help you establish a calm, relaxed state of alertness with access to the energies you need to deliver to those executives.

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Here is a simple way to develop this ability and enhance your sense of being settled and centered. It is a walking activity with measured breathing, holding your breath and exhaling-all under your control.



4:4:4

**4 steps inhaling:
4 steps holding your breath:
and
4 steps exhaling.**

You learn how to comfortably inhale to a full breath, hold it and exhaling comfortable to empty. ⁽³⁾

You can do this walking from your car to the office and office to car in the evening. Do it for a week and see how it affects you. We suspect you will continue the practice once you feel the benefits. There are many other methods, breathing rhythms and other methods, to activate the Relaxation Response. With practice, you can develop a whole new sense of self-control for those tense or stressful situations. Now instead of “getting through it “ you focus on the outcome of your successful request from senior executives.

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