



The above is a simple picture representation of the square breathing technique.

Square Breathing for the Reduction of Anxiety

Cognitive behavioral therapy has hundreds of research articles in support of it as the most effective treatment for numerous psychological problems. It is helpful for everything from depression to relationship problems. One thing the research has shown repeatedly, is that cognitive behavioral therapy is especially effective at treating anxiety disorders. There are numerous CBT interventions to target anxiety, including systematic exposure, cognitive restructuring, and mindfulness training. The following technique is a form of relaxation training that can be used in conjunction with one of the aforementioned interventions, or all on its own.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) helps people reduce the intensity of negative emotions. However, we cannot change our emotions by focusing on them directly. Otherwise it would work when people told us to "calm down." What we can change however, is our thoughts, behaviors, and to some extent, our physiology. Because all of these components affect one another, CBT helps us to change emotions by changing the things that feed the emotions.

One emotion that CBT has been proven to be helpful for time and again, is anxiety. As human beings, we all experience anxiety from time to time. It's natural. It's normal. And if we didn't, we'd probably get into a lot of trouble. Unfortunately, sometimes anxiety can become too intense and get in the way of our effectiveness (think going blank during a final exam). Cognitive behavioral therapy has numerous treatments for anxiety, and most of them are among the most effective psychological treatments studied by scientists. One that is easy to learn is square breathing, also known as relaxation breathing. A note of caution: If you have any medical condition that might be adversely affected by slowing down your breathing or holding your breath, please consult with your doctor first. This can include cardiovascular problems, epilepsy, and asthma.

Steps for Square Breathing:

STEP 1: Find a quiet place in which you can sit for ten to fifteen minutes without being distracted.

STEP 2: Take note of your normal breathing pattern, and count how many seconds each inhale and exhale take.

STEP 3: Once you have a baseline measurement, increase the length of the inhalation and exhalation by one second, in essence slowing down each in-breath and out-breath. Once you have acclimated to the new , slower rate, increase the inhalation and exhalation by another second. If you feel uncomfortable or out of breath, it probably means you're slowing down too fast. Continue gradually slowing down your breath until you are breathing as slowly as you can without ANY difficulty.

STEP 4: Once you are comfortable with a slower breath, experiment by pausing after each exhalation and each inhalation. These pauses can be short, lasting one or two seconds, or long, lasting up to ten seconds. However long the pauses last, just note you will probably have to adjust your rate of inhalation and exhalation to continue breathing comfortably, without feeling the need to gasp for air. The technique is called square breathing because originally the in-breath, out-breath, and both pauses were designed to be the same length, in the same way each side of a square is the same length. However, it doesn't really matter the ratio, as long as fewer breaths are taken each minute.

STEP 5: Set an alarm and continue this for ten to fifteen minutes. Afterward, you will most likely experience an increase in relaxation, and a significant decrease in anxiety. AMAZING. Normally when we are anxious, the result in our body is that our breathing rate increases, and we take shorter, shallower breaths. When we are relaxed, the opposite happens. By slowing down the breath, we trick our brain into thinking we are relaxed, and all of the relaxation neuro-chemicals are released.

Research has shown engaging in this technique has immediate effects in the brain. More importantly, studies have proven that engaging in square breathing twice daily lowers overall levels of anxiety long-term in people who are prone to excessive worry.

Try it out to see how it works. If it's helpful, the next time you experience anxiety, pull out your square breathing and take things down a few notches.

References:

<http://cogbtherapy.com/cbt-blog/2013/08/reduce-anxiety-quickly-with-square.html>