




Simple breathing technique  
to reduce stress and promote alertness

# Guided Meditation Practice

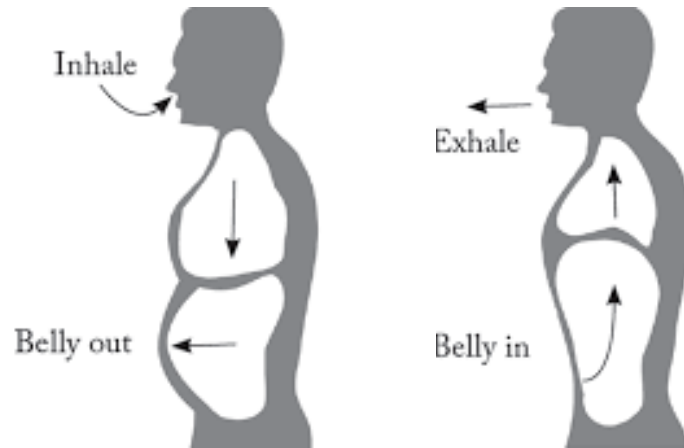
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Andrew Zair



# Posture

- Begin by grounding your feet on the floor and ensure your back is in an upright, alert position. You should be upright and alert, without being rigid
- **CHECK:** if somebody removed the back of your chair would you still remain upright?
- **EXAMS:** this position promotes alertness and clear thinking. If you have a mind-blank in the exam, check in with your posture

# Abdominal breathing



- Imagine that you have a balloon in your abdomen or belly
  - As you inhale deeply through the nose, inflate the balloon
  - As you exhale through the mouth, imagine you are slowly blowing a candle
  - Pay attention and *feel* the sensations of your belly expanding and contracting
  - You may recall '7-11' or '4-7 breathing' from .b
- **CHECK:** The intention is to make the candle *flicker*, not go out
- **EXAMS:** If in a state of stress or anxiety apply this ratio for inhale to exhale. This will downregulate (calm) your nervous system



## Now breathe...

- Ground your feet on the floor, connect with your abdominal breath, and breathe in and out deeply 6 times
- With each breath let go of any thoughts you may have and really focus your attention on the inhale and the exhale: the inflating of the balloon and the blowing out of the candle
- Don't try too hard, just allow the breath to sit in the forefront of your focus. Exhale for longer than you inhale
- Allow the shoulders to soften
- Breathing in, breathing out...

# The science (in a nutshell)

- Ever panicked when you see a question you can't remember the answer to, then you get a 'mind-blank'? That in turn causes more stress, and a negative spiral occurs – not ideal in an exam!
- When we experience stress or a threat (in this case panic at forgetting an answer) our mind acts in a way which tries to help us: *fight, flight or freeze*. This is our nervous system's automatic and very natural reaction to stress. This stress-response has foundation in the ancient part of our brain linked to the limbic system. In this example, the mind going blank is the 'freeze' reaction – our natural way of trying to cope. Unfortunately in the middle of an exam, it doesn't help.

Often we start to fluster, our heart-rate goes up, we lose focus and can underperform.

- To step out of this negative spiral we need to down-regulate the nervous system (and soothe our natural fight – flight – freeze reaction) and allow logic to arise. Under pressure the limbic system goes into overdrive and the amygdala fires strongly: by focusing on the breath or the body we activate the parasympathetic nervous system. This calms us – and with practice it can calm us quickly. It then allows the pre-frontal cortex (logic and response centre) to engage, enabling us to make skilful decisions and progress with the task at hand. We may not be able to answer the question, but we can decide to move on in a calm manner.