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Stress and anxiety are universal experiences, and almost everyone faces them during their lives. Sometimes, the symptoms are fleeting and manageable; other times, they can be persistent and overwhelming (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). Our bodies are built to have stress to keep us alive, and some stress can even be helpful or adaptive (e.g., stress can help to motivate us to study for an exam or play soccer; Eubank & Gilbourne, 2003; Örün et al., 2021; Ramaprabou & Dash, 2018). However, when stress escalates it can become anxiety, which is defined as feelings of excessive fear and worry that restrict normal daily activities (WHO, 2022). Internationally, anxiety is the most experienced mental health disorder, affecting about 301 million people (WHO, 2023). It is okay to seek support for anxiety disorders when they feel like too much to handle.

One way to cope with stress and anxiety symptoms is to practice breathing exercises, which can help calm your body down in times of stress. When someone experiences anxiety, various hormones are produced, which cause physical symptoms. Deep breathing can help lower perceived stress levels and reduce negative emotions (Perciavalle, 2017). It has also been successfully used in clinics for people who have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), phobias, depression, and other mental health concerns (Örün et al., 2021).

Here are two different breathing techniques that can help reduce or manage symptoms of stress or anxiety:

1. **Pursed Lips Breathing** is a technique that can help slow heart rate and fast-paced breathing in times of stress. It calms the nervous system and allows the person to practice easy control over their breath. It can also lower blood pressure (Gholamrezaei et al., 2021). **Here is how to do it:**

- - *Step 1.* Breathe in through your nose slowly for two seconds. Feel the air move through your body as you feel your belly expand.
  - *Step 2.* Shape lips into an "o" and breathe out slowly for four to five seconds. Don't force the air out.
  - *Step 3.* Repeat these steps, without holding your breath, until breathing returns to normal and you feel calm (Medline Plus, n.d.).

1. **Box breathing** (square breathing or 4-4-4 breathing) is a technique that U.S. Navy Seals have used. The four-part breathing cycle that is produced resembles the shape of a square. It engages the parts of your brain that do emotional regulation by engaging stress relieving functions in your body (Balban et al., 2023; Young, 2021). **Here is how to do it:**

- - *Step 1.* Breathe in through your nose for four seconds.
  - *Step 2.* Hold your breath for four seconds.
  - *Step 3.* Breathe out through your mouth for four seconds.
  - *Step 4.* Hold for four seconds.
  - Repeat that process.
  - If four seconds feels too long, try two or three seconds instead.

Adding breathing techniques to your daily routine can be a beneficial way to manage symptoms of stress and anxiety. Consistent practice helps make using these tools during stressful moments more manageable. Try pursed lips breathing or box breathing to get started or find what works for you in the resources below. Breathing exercisescan be used at anytime, anywhere. You can do breathing exercises for 30 seconds or 15 minutes, however long as you want. These techniques can provide some relief, and seeing a licensed mental health professional for symptoms of anxiety or stress can also be beneficial to learn these skills and more.

Additional Resources

- Psychology Today Find a Therapist: https://www.psychologytoday.com/us

- UC Davis Guided Mindfulness Practices: https://health.ucdavis.edu/well-being/program/guided-mindfulness-practices
- UC Davis Breathing Resources: https://healthy.ucdavis.edu/mental-emotional/resource-library/general/breathing
- Self-Compassion Guided Practices: https://self-compassion.org/self-compassion-practices/#guided-practices
- USU Extension Relationships: https://extension.usu.edu/relationships/research/why-stress-management-strategies-work

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