



Mount Sinai Selikoff Centers for Occupational Health

Monitoring and Treatment



WTC Health Program

## Mindful Breathing: A Tool for Difficult Times

These are unprecedented times. During particularly stressful periods, it is easy to neglect our emotional needs. The current stressors – especially when coupled with past stressors or traumatic experiences – may start to affect our emotional well-being, our relationships, and even our ability to enjoy those things in life from which we draw meaning. How do we find a moment in our hectic day for meaningful pause? For self-care?

One way is to focus on our breathing, which is an automatic activity that we do all the time. There are many ways to practice mindfulness of our breath, and one of them is diaphragmatic breathing, also referred to as belly breathing. Diaphragmatic breathing can help you relax which decreases how much of the stress hormone cortisol is released into your body. This in turn lowers your heart rate, regulates blood pressure, and reduces anxiety or panic. Daily practice is recommended to make it easier for you to use the technique when feeling anxious or distressed.

### Suggested Daily Practice

1. Sit in a comfortable position or lie flat on the floor, your bed, or another comfortable, flat surface.
2. Relax your shoulders. The shoulders and neck area tend to hold a great deal of stress. Take a moment and notice if the shoulder and neck area are tense, and take a deep breath and notice them begin to relax.
3. Put a hand on your chest and a hand on your stomach.
4. Breathe in through your nose for about two seconds. You should experience the air moving through your nostrils into your abdomen, making your stomach expand. During this type of breathing, make sure your stomach is moving outward.
5. Then, exhale slowly for about two seconds, noticing your stomach contract.
6. Repeat.



As you end your practice, notice your body and notice if you are feeling a sense of relaxation. If you are, great! If you are not feeling more relaxed, compassionately consider what is happening in that moment for you. As you continue your daily practice, begin to increase the amount of time that you allow yourself to inhale and exhale.

If you are experiencing symptoms of distress related to your emotional well-being, please reach out for help. Should you require immediate medical attention, please call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room. You may also contact Mount Sinai's Emergency Department at 212-241-6500 or 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255). If you reside in NYC, you may also contact NYC Well at 1-888-NYC-WELL (1-888-692-9355).

The World Trade Center Health Program also provides mental health services for 9/11 related conditions. If you are interested in seeking assistance or learning more, please contact us directly at 212-241-8462 or 212-241-3250.