

Lifestyle Medicine: Tools for Promoting Healthy Change
June 26, 2009 ♦ Boston, MA

Mini-relaxation exercises help reduce anxiety and tension immediately. You can do them with your eyes open or closed (but make sure that your eyes are open when you are driving). You can do them anywhere, any time, and no one will know that you are doing them.

Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital
(http://www.mbmi.org/basics/mstress_RIAH.asp)

Some good times to "do a mini" are when you are:

1. Stuck in traffic
2. Put on "hold" during an important phone call
3. In your doctor's waiting room
4. Someone says something which upsets you
5. Waiting for a phone call
6. Sitting in the dentist's chair
7. Feeling overwhelmed by what you need to accomplish in the near future.
8. Standing in line
9. In pain

"Minis" are most beneficial for people who elicit the relaxation response on a regular basis. Minis quickly recall this relaxation state, but they can help anyone feel refreshed, calmer, and better able to concentrate.

The basic method for doing a mini is quite simple:

Put your hand just below your navel. Take a deep breath, bringing the air in through your nose and out through your mouth. You should feel your stomach rising about an inch as you breathe in, and falling about an inch as you breathe out. This is diaphragmatic breathing. If this is still difficult for you, lie on your back or on your stomach, where you will be more aware of your breathing pattern. Remember to relax your stomach muscles.

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Here are some variations:

Mini Version 1

Count very slowly to yourself from 10 down to zero, one number for each breath. With the first diaphragmatic breath, you say "10" to yourself, with the next breath, you say "nine", etc. If you start feeling light-headed or dizzy, slow down the counting. When you get to "zero", see how you are feeling. If you are feeling better, great! If not, try doing it again.

Mini Version 2

As you inhale, count very slowly up to four; as you exhale, count slowly back down to one. Thus, as you inhale, you say to yourself "one, two, three, four," as you exhale, you say to yourself "four, three, two, one." Do this several times.

Mini Version 3

After each inhalation, pause for a few seconds; after you exhale, pause again for a few seconds. Do this for several breaths.