

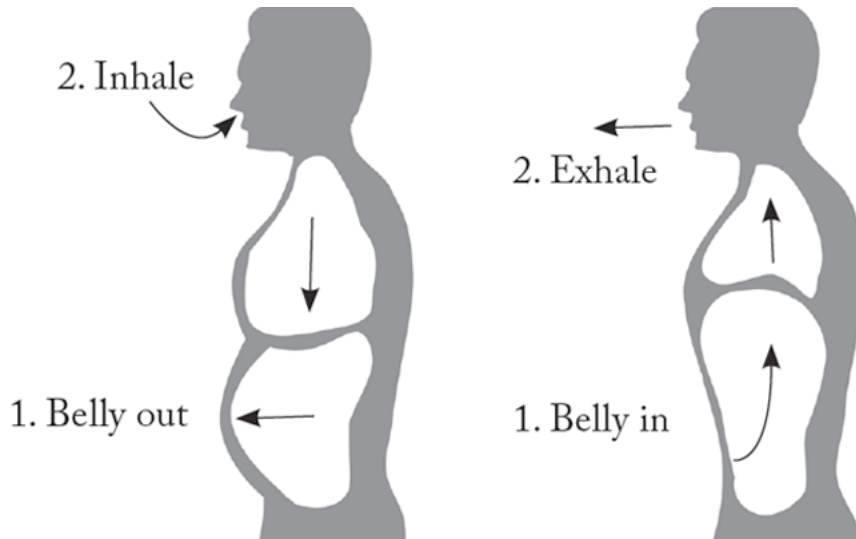
Coherent Breathing

The moment we anticipate or experience stress in any form, most of us restrict our breathing, breathe in a stuttered fashion, or even hold our breath altogether. Breath restriction activates the fight/flight/freeze response in the body, causing a cascade of rapid hormonal changes that increase sensations of pain, agitation, anxiety or fear.

Coherent breathing is a simple, scientifically proven method that reduces both chronic and acute stress reactions. It can be practiced at intervals throughout the day in virtually any setting. There are very few instances when we can't engage in coherent breathing, such as when we are speaking or exercising. Once we practice coherent breathing enough, it begins to generalize, helping us breathe this way more often and naturally.

To practice **coherent breathing**, inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Keep these guidelines in mind:

- Breathe more slowly (aim for about five or six breaths per minute).
- Breathe more deeply, from the belly. Think about expanding your abdomen and widening your rib cage as you inhale.
- Exhale longer than you inhale. It's the exhale that triggers the relaxation response.



A period of **coherent breathing** is a good way to start and end one's day. Many find it helpful for inducing sleep. If you anticipate a stressful event, practice it just prior to that happening, as well as after. Consider using it between a series of potentially stressful events, as well as when triggered (reactive fear or anger) by persons or situations.