**Deep Abdominal Breathing for Stress Relief**

Deep abdominal breathing or diaphragmatic breathing is extremely therapeutic and one of the top stress management tips. It also has a profound effect on the body, both physically and mentally.

As soon as you use this technique:

· The heart rate drops

· Blood pressure decreases

· The muscles relax

· We bring the air to the lower part of the lungs where the oxygen exchange is most efficient

· This oxygenates all the cells of the body

· We activate our parasympathetic nervous system, or our relaxation response

· Anxiety decreases

· We gain a complete sense of control over our body, our emotions and the situation.

As we grow we begin to change the way we breathe and eventually end up

doing very shallow breathing using only the top part of our lungs.

It is essential for us and especially for stress management to relearn how to breathe!

During deep abdominal breathing we always inhale and exhale through the nose. The nose is for breathing, the mouth for eating or talking. You might think that when you exercise you always exhale through the mouth. Yes, if you are doing cardiovascular exercise and you are getting out of breath you need to exhale through the mouth. But for deep abdominal breathing we inhale and exhale through the nose.

**How to Practice Deep Abdominal Breathing**

Sit up straight and comfortably in a straight-back chair, or on a firm cushion sitting cross-legged on the floor, shoulders back, back straight, chin slightly in, feet firmly planted on the floor if sitting on a chair. It is important to have the spine straight so the air and energy can flow easily.

Inhale and exhale through the nose. As you slowly inhale the abdomen expands. Fill up the lungs, right to the top of the clavicles (collar bones.) As you exhale and empty the lungs, the abdomen goes back in. Again, slowly and deeply inhale, filling up the lungs, abdomen going out, followed by a long, full exhalation, emptying the lungs, the abdomen going back in.

Nothing is forced or exaggerated. We simply use the full lung capacity instead of doing the shallow breathing we usually do during the day.

It may feel awkward at first. You might think that as you inhale the abdomen should be going in. But it is the same as when you blow air into a balloon, the balloon expands. As we bring air into the lungs, the abdomen expands. If you like, you can try placing a hand on your abdomen to feel the movement of the abdomen, until you get the hang of it.

You can use this kind of deep breathing anywhere, anytime to immediately bring yourself into a more relaxed, calm state, better able to stay in control and respond to stressful situations.