

## Breathing our way back to relaxation...

Breathing is second nature. Our first breath is taken just after birth and we don't stop as long as we are alive. In fact it is the definition of being alive. Yet breathing *consciously* and *deliberately* has been shown to have added benefits to "just keeping us alive."

It turns out that learning to breathe consciously and deliberately can move us out of the "*fight or flight response*" and into the "*relaxation response*." Without going into detail about all the research that has been done to support this, suffice it to say that it works. **Simply breathing in a particular way can help us to re-focus our minds, slow our heart rate, relax our tense muscles and re-energize our digestive and immune systems.** It is not the answer to all our problems, but it can help us regain some control during the stressful situations of our trying times. And as with anything, this skill improves with practice.

### Here's how to:

It is actually easiest to learn this lying down flat on the floor, a bed, or a sofa. We begin by placing one hand over the navel (belly button) and the other on the chest. Observing the breathing just as it is, we might notice that both hands move a little though the hand on the chest generally moves more. In abdominal, diaphragmatic, or "belly" breathing as it is often called, we emphasize the movement of the hand placed over the navel. Breathing into the belly allows us to take fuller deeper breaths. [Infants breathe this way naturally. Only later as we grow up, do we learn to breathe more shallowly into the chest.]

Now, experiment by allowing the hand on the belly to rise as the breath comes in, and fall as the breath goes out, letting the hand on the chest be more still. It is important to take our time and be gentle in this process, as it is a new experience for many of us to again locate the diaphragm. [Pronounced "dye-a-gram," this is the breathing muscle]. Once we have found the "belly breath," we can then continue to practice gently breathing into and out of the belly. In time we can begin breathing a little more deeply, expanding our capacity to bring more air into our lungs with this abdominal breathing technique.

The more air that fills the lungs with each breath, the fewer times the heart has to beat to distribute the same amount of oxygen around the body. This allows a lower heart rate which in turn triggers relaxation of the muscles. As the body begins to relax, the digestive system kicks back into gear and the immune system picks up where it left off when we were faced with our most recent stressful situation.

**Simply speaking, stabilizing the breath using abdominal breathing, and with it, focusing the mind, allows the body to find its way back to a healthier, more relaxed way of being.**

Give it a try... Practice breathing more fully, and begin to enjoy a wonderful, more relaxed fall.

