**Exercise**

UK English

# How Breathing Affects Feelings

PSYCHOLOGYTOOLS®

Downloaded by Beverley Cummins on 2022-04-23

# How Breathing Affects Feelings

## Description

Anxious clients are often unaware of the profound physiological effects related to breathing. *How Breathing Affects Feelings* is an information handout which gives a clear description of the causes and consequences of hyperventilation. It outlines what happens to blood oxygenation levels when we breathe normally, when we exercise, and when we breathe in an anxious way. Finally, it also includes a calm diaphragmatic breathing exercise designed to stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system and to promote relaxation and soothing. Use this information sheet with clients who are anxious, or with any clients who would benefit from learning a soothing and grounding skill and understanding why breathing calmly is so important.

## Instructions

This is a Psychology Tools information handout. Suggested uses include:

- Client handout – use as a psychoeducation resource.
- Discussion point – use to provoke a discussion and explore client beliefs.
- Therapist learning tool – improve your familiarity with a psychological construct.
- Teaching resource – use as a learning tool during training.

## References

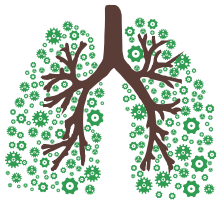
Cannon, W. B. (1920). Bodily changes in pain, hunger, fear, and rage. D. Appleton & Company.

Downloaded by Beverley Cummins on 2022-04-23



Copyright © 2020 Psychology Tools Limited. All rights reserved.

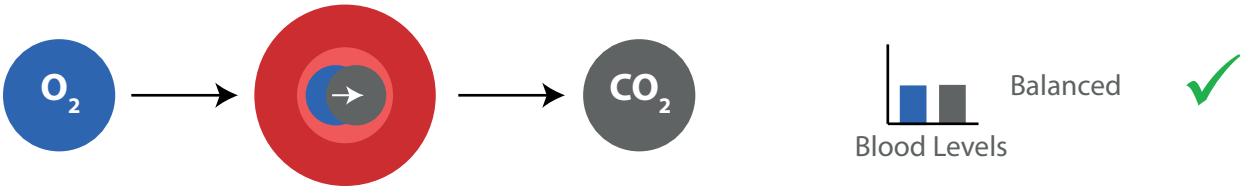
## How Breathing Affects Feelings



The way we breathe is strongly linked to the way we feel. When we are relaxed we breathe slowly, and when we are anxious we breathe more quickly.

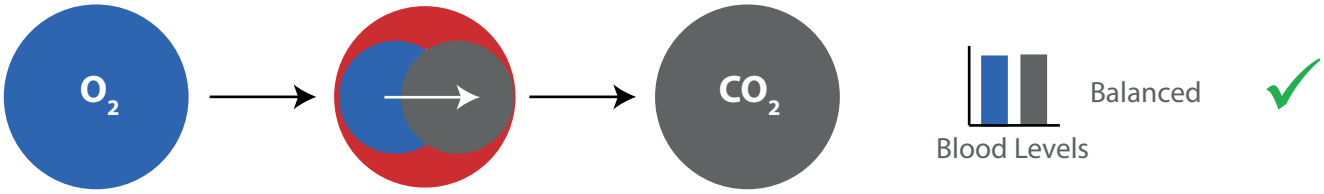
### Normal breathing

When we breathe we take in oxygen ($O_2$) that is used by the body. This process creates carbon dioxide ($CO_2$), a waste product that we breathe out. When our breathing is relaxed the levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide are balanced - this allows our body to function efficiently.



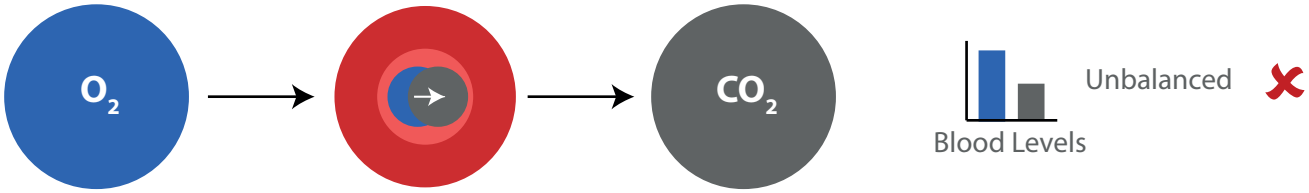

### Exercise breathing

Our breathing rate increases during exercise to take in more oxygen. The body uses the extra oxygen to fuel the muscles and so produces more carbon dioxide. The increased breathing rate leads to more carbon dioxide being expelled. This means that the balance between oxygen and carbon dioxide levels is maintained.




### Anxious breathing

When we are anxious our breathing rate increases: we take in more oxygen and breathe out more carbon dioxide than usual. However, because the body is not working any harder than normal it is not using up any extra oxygen, and so it is not producing any extra carbon dioxide. Because carbon dioxide is being expelled faster than it is being produced its concentration in the blood goes down (leading to a temporary change in the pH of the blood called respiratory alkalosis). This change in $CO_2$ blood concentration can lead us to feeling unpleasantly light-headed, tingly in our fingers and toes, clammy, and sweaty.




When our breathing returns to its usual rate the levels of carbon dioxide in the blood return to normal, and the symptoms resolve. You can deliberately relax your breathing to feel better.

### Relaxed breathing instructions

1. Sit or lie down comfortably. Close your eyes if you would like to.
2. Breathe slowly and steadily in through your nose for a count of 4.
3. Hold your breath for a count of 2.
4. Breathe out slowly and steadily for a count of 4.
5. Repeat for a few minutes.

Downloaded by Beverley Cummins on 2022-04-23



Copyright © 2020 Psychology Tools Limited. All rights reserved.

## Resource details

Title: How Breathing Affects Feelings
Language: English (GB)
Translated title: How Breathing Affects Feelings
Type: Exercise
Document orientation: Portrait
URL: https://www.psychologytools.com/resource/how-breathing-affects-feelings/


## Terms & conditions

This resource may be used by licensed members of Psychology Tools and their clients. Resources must be used in accordance with our terms and conditions which can be found at: https://www.psychologytools.com/terms-and-conditions/

## Disclaimer

Your use of this resource is not intended to be, and should not be relied on, as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. If you are suffering from any mental health issues we recommend that you seek formal medical advice before using these resources. We make no warranties that this information is correct, complete, reliable or suitable for any purpose. As a professional user, you should work within the bounds of your own competencies, using your own skill and knowledge, and therefore the resources should be used to support good practice, not to replace it.

## Copyright

Unless otherwise stated, this resource is Copyright © 2020 Psychology Tools Limited. All rights reserved.





Copyright © 2020 Psychology Tools Limited. All rights reserved.

Downloaded by Beverley Cummins on 2022-04-23