Relaxation Technique:

Deep Breathing for Stress Relief

Does breathing deeply really help you relax? You bet!

One of the best things about deep breathing is that it can be done anywhere and can quickly make a difference.

The key is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much fresh air as possible in your lungs. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel.

Here is an easy but powerful exercise:

- *Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.*

- *Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little.*

- *Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little.*

- *Take a deep breath in through your nose…2, 3, 4, 5, 6.*

- *And now, breathe out slowly through your mouth…2, 3, 4, 5, 6.*

- *Continue breathing at your own pace, counting if it's helpful. If your mind becomes distracted by thoughts, try to focus on your breathing again.*

You may like to pray or focus on special words while you're breathing deeply. For example, you may say to yourself: "I'm breathing in the Holy Spirit (while you inhale)…I'm breathing out peace (while you exhale)." Or "Peace (while you inhale)…Hope (while you exhale)"

Try this lying on the floor, while you're in the car or on the shuttle bus, while you're in the waiting room, while you're at dinner, and while you're falling asleep at night. If you need reminders, put sticky notes in strategic places like on your bathroom mirror and on the dashboard of your car that say BREATHE!