**Diaphragmatic Breathing**

Diaphragmatic breathing, or abdominal breathing, is a type of deep breathing believed to be a healthy alternative to the shallow, chest breathing commonly associated with anxiety and panic. In diaphragmatic breathing an individual breathes through their diaphragm, a muscle located between the chest and abdominal cavities. Diaphragmatic breathing is a widely supported anxiety and stress management technique that is believed to induce a state of relaxation and reduce autonomic system arousal.

**To practice diaphragmatic breathing, follow these steps:**

1. Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
2. Place one hand on chest, and one hand on your stomach.
3. Begin to inhale slowly through your nose, allowing your diaphragm to fill with air. The hand is on your stomach is the hand that should move when you inhale. If the hand that is on your chest moves, then you are engaging in shallow “chest breathing,” not deep diaphragmatic breathing. The hand that is on your stomach should move outward as you inhale, and then move inward as you exhale and the diaphragm collapses.
4. As you exhale, breathe through your nose, and allow the air to exit your diaphragm slowly.
5. Continue diaphragmatic breathing for a few minutes (5-10).

**A few diaphragmatic breathing tips:**

1. Breathe fully, slowly, and deeply in and out, paying close attention to the movement of the hand that is on your stomach.
2. Remember that this is a skill, and it may take a while for it to feel natural.
3. If you begin to notice your attention drifting away from your breathing, gently redirect it back to the breath.
4. Practice this type of breathing for short periods of time, multiple times per day. Whenever you notice your breathing, simply attend to it for a few breaths and try to breathe through your diaphragm.
5. This exercise can be used at any time, but it can be especially useful if you know you’re about to go into a stressful situation, in order to remain calm.
6. Another way to think about diaphragmatic breathing is to…
   1. Imagine you are blowing up a balloon in your stomach as you inhale, and deflating it as you exhale.
   2. Imaging you are filling up your stomach from the bottom up as you inhale.

(Adapted from Davis, M., Eshelman, E., & McKay, M. (2008). *The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook: 6th Edition.* New Harbinger Publications, Incorporated: Oakland, CA.)