

CONTROLLING THE STRESS RESPONSE

Stress, particularly periods of extended stress can have serious effects on us from triggering muscle aches and pains, to headaches and migraines, to serious disease including heart attacks and cancers.

It is not always possible to eliminate, or even reduce the source of the stress. However, you can shift your body's response to that stress, moving from the 'fight or flight' response to a more restful and relaxed state.

The following exercise is one of many offered by the *Emergent WorkForce™* program to help you manage your stress response. It only takes a few minutes to make a difference.

1:2 BREATHING EXERCISE

Breathing is something we take for granted, and rarely think about. Yet, focusing on breathing in specific ways can make monumental shifts in your physical and mental state of being. The following experience will maximize the effectiveness of your breathing for improved mental and physical health.

Diaphragmatic Breathing is, simply stated, breathing from your diaphragm. Diaphragmatic breathing (inhaling from your belly through your nose) activates the Vagus nerve, the 10th of the 12 pairs of nerves that run from your brain to your body, connecting the brain to all the organs. Exhaling and holding your breath after the exhale further taps into the Vagus nerve.

1:2 breathing helps to create a shift from the sympathetic (*the Fight or Flight*) system to the Parasympathetic (*the Rest and Digest*) system,

STEP 1: PRE-1:2 BREATHING

Before you begin, note how you feel in this moment. Don't judge - just notice.

Is your mind calm or busy? Is it foggy or alert? Are you anxious or calm? Are you feeling tense, or relaxed?

STEP 2: DIAPHRAMATIC 1:2 BREATHING

The experience of 1:2 Breathing maximizes the benefits of diaphragmatic breathing.

To practice 1:2 breathing, place your hand on your belly. Breathe in through your nose for a length of time (eg. 3 secs), sending the breath all the way down into your belly, so that your hand lifts away from your spine as you breathe in. When you exhale, push that air out of your lungs from your diaphragm, so that your hand comes back toward your spine. Exhale with a sigh for twice as long as your inhale (eg. 6 seconds).

Hold your breath for a few seconds before the inhale again, and then repeat the process. Continue for one or two minutes.

STEP 3: POST 1:2 BREATHING

Notice any shift in how you feel now compared to before you began. Do you feel calmer, more relaxed, more focused?

Use this exercise whenever you feel your stress levels rising.

