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## Mindfulness: Belly Breathing

Have you ever seen a baby breathe? With each breath its little belly moves, not the chest. That's our natural breathing method, and with this activity you will learn to use belly breathing, or diaphragmatic breathing, to naturally relax the body.

### **Question 1:** Am I a Chest Breather or a Belly Breather?

To check whether you are breathing shallowly or more deeply, do the following:

- Sit in a chair, with an erect but comfortable posture.
- Place one palm on your chest and the other palm on your stomach (below the rib cage and above the navel).
- Take some normal breaths. Which hand or hands move? If you're not sure, look in the mirror.
- If the top or both hands are moving, then you're a chest breather. If the bottom hand moves, you're getting a fuller breath. In either case, follow along to get the most out of your belly breathing.

### **Question 2:** How Can I Retrain Myself to Belly Breathe?

You are going to learn a movement that gently stretches muscles that run between the ribs—naturally hinging the ribs open so you can get a more full breath.

- Reach behind your chair with your arms and bring your hands together.
- Relax the abdominal muscles so your stomach can move outward as your lungs press on the stomach cavity.
- Notice if there's more movement in the belly. It's that easy.
- If you didn't notice any belly breathing, try this posture: raise your arms above your head and clasp your hands behind your neck. This opens the chest area and makes taking a deeper breath easier.

### **Question 3:** How Should I Practice or Use Belly Breathing?

- Try practicing for 1-minute at a time, three times a day to start.
- You can notice when you feel tense or stressed, and do a minute right then.
- Pay attention to your posture, especially if you're sitting at a computer.
- Practice while standing up or lying down.

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