

# Breathing Techniques for Managing Workplace Stress

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One of the easiest and most effective ways to ease stress at work is to simply take a deep breath. By focusing on your breath, from slowing it down and breathing from your diaphragm to visualisation and meditation, you can relax your mind and body. This reduces stress and helps you to perform better at work.



Two in five working Australians find the workplace a source of stress and 72 per cent say that it is having an impact on their physical health, according to the latest Stress and Wellbeing Survey conducted by the Australian Psychological Society.

The survey also found that a high percentage of Australians use food, alcohol, shopping and television to help them manage their stress. But according to senior physiotherapist, Paula Luke, these methods do little to de-stress your mind as they are just distractions.

"Distractions such as drinking alcohol and watching TV take the conscious mind off stress but they are still not releasing the body's response to it," says Paula.

Paula recommends doing the following breathing exercises in the morning, when feeling stressed during the day and at night:

- breathe in for four counts and breathe out for four
- breathe in for five counts and breathe out for five
- continue to slow down your breathing until you reach up to eight counts.

Paula frequently sees professional clients with the stress-related symptoms of tightened deep frontline muscles.

"The deep frontline myofascial train of muscles are activated with the fight or flight response when someone is highly stressed."

She explains that it starts with jaw clenching or grinding teeth causing headaches, sleeplessness, damage to the teeth and

tightened muscles associated with breathing - the intercostals of the ribs and the quadratus lumborum. This leads to shallow, rapid breathing, rising heart rate and activated accessory muscles, such as the neck.

"The deep frontline will continue to grip until you train your mind to let go, consciously slowing your breath down to release the muscles. Regular mindfulness breathing exercises can improve work performance, reduce injuries, prevent teeth damage, enhance sleep and allow for more efficient brain functioning."

Mindfulness breathing exercises can easily be done at work, such as the six second Quieting Response (see below). Many of us are missing this simple key to managing work-related stress.

## Quieting Response

- 'Smile inwardly' with your eyes and mouth, roll your shoulders down your back and let go of your stomach muscles.
- Imagine holes in the soles of your feet. As you take a deep breath in, visualise hot air flowing through these holes and slowly relaxing your muscles, up your legs, through your abdomen and filling your lungs.
- When you exhale reverse to visualise hot air coming out the same holes in your feet.

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