



# PROACTIVE ANXIETY RESPONSES

## 1. Practice paced breathing

Proper breathing is essential for control of anxiety and panic.

- Underbreathing (slower and/or shallow) *increases* carbon dioxide retention-this triggers the suffocation response in panic prone people, leading to compensatory overbreathing
- Overbreathing (hyperventilation) *decreases* carbon dioxide-this causes feelings of depersonalization, dizziness, numbness, and confusion

When anxious or tense, it is easier to *breathe out first*.

Step One: Slowly exhale through the open mouth making a “s h h h h h” sound  
Listen to the sound, or feel muscles relax, letting go of tension.

Step Two: Breathe in through the nose slowly, (mouth closed)  
and count 1 – 2 – 3 – 4

Step Three: Hold to count of 1 – 2 – 3 – 4      REPEAT STEPS

## 2. Find distractions

Focus attention on something outside yourself. This might include listening to music, going for a walk, or calling a friend. “Lose your mind and come to your senses.”

## 3. Use conditioned relaxation response

Make relaxation a part of your daily routine. Set aside time to practice your favorite relaxation activity. This might be working-out, playing sports, games, cards, movies, listening to music, etc. When relaxation is regularly practiced, your body forms a memory of what it feels like to be relaxed. This memory is a tool you can use when you feel anxious. Practice relaxing in anxiety evoking situations.