# Breathing Exercise

You may not always notice that your breathing affects how you feel. When you are upset, you may automatically take a deep breath to calm down. When you are anxious, you may breathe in quick, shallow breaths. Very often, when people become frightened or upset, they hold their breath. If they feel as if they need more air, they may hyperventilate. Taking a deep breath or breathing quickly often does not help. In fact, hyperventilation causes anxious feelings. If you feel anxious and want to calm down, you need to slow your breathing and take in less air. Rather than taking a deep breath, take a normal breath and exhale slowly. *Exhaling* helps you to relax, not *inhaling*.

Learning to control your breathing takes daily practice. At first, practice when you are not anxious. Later, when you have learned breathing awareness and control, you will find it helpful in stressful situations.

This breathing exercise can help you:

- Increase awareness of your breathing patterns
- Slow down your breathing
- Practice breathing differently on a regular basis to manage tension and fear

## Instructions

1. Get comfortable, and take a slow, normal breath in through your nose with your mouth closed, to the count of five. Focus on extending your abdomen while you breathe in slowly.

2. Pause for five seconds.

3. Exhale slowly through your nose or mouth to the count of seven. Say a soothing word to yourself as you breathe out, such as "C-a-a-a-a-a-l-m."

4. Practice this exercise several times a day, taking 10 to 15 breaths at each practice.