

MIND-BODY SKILLS GROUP



“Soft Belly”

Close your eyes... and allow your attention to settle inward, and downward into the body. Become aware of your breathing. Gradually allow your breathing to shift – softer, slower, and deeper if that is comfortable for you.

...Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth (or through the nose if that is more calming for you). Sense the air moving downwards keeping the chest and neck relaxed. Notice how the belly expands with the in breath, and relaxes with the out breath. This deepens the breath, the exchange of oxygen, and relaxing nerves, muscles, and the ‘busy mind’. With each breath, silently say to yourself “soft” as you breathe in and “belly” as you breathe out. (If after learning the basic technique, you would like to substitute alternate word choices, that is welcome).

Continue this approach for several minutes. Each day you can add another minute or two to it until you are practicing for 10 minutes or longer. If thoughts come, let them come, and watch them go, each time gently returning back to soft belly breathing.

Do this anytime you are feeling fast, tense, or stressed; or at bedtime if you are having trouble sleeping. Soon, you’ll find that in times of stress you can take a few deep breaths and say, “Soft...belly,” and relaxation will come quickly.

“Soft belly” is just one of many forms of relaxation.

Regular relaxation/regulation response training has impressive results for people with many health challenges; decreased levels of perceived stress and increased immune functioning; decreased pain; faster recovery from procedures; fewer side effects from chemotherapy, and less anticipatory nausea and vomiting before chemotherapy; decreased anxiety, improved mood, and less suppression of emotions. Relaxation, regulation, and meditation training also helps us to gain perspective on every aspect of life, and to feel less overwhelmed by it. If you can cultivate “comfort with discomfort” during difficult times, we regain a sense of agency over the challenging and unpleasant experiences and conditions that we encounter.

Meditation and relaxation are built into the base of all of the other mind-body therapies, and the soil that nourishes their use and effectiveness.