Get Tough on Angina™

An Educational Booklet for Patients and Families

Your Guide to Understanding and Taking Control of Your Angina

PCNA
Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association
www.pcna.net
Dear Patients,

This booklet was written by members of the Board of Directors of the Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association (PCNA). Our mission is to provide education that will help you have better heart health. We hope this booklet helps you understand more about your angina so that you can live a full and active life.

Nurses, nurse practitioners, physicians, physician’s assistants, nutritionists, pharmacists, and other health care professionals are all members of PCNA. They work with patients in doctor offices, clinics, and hospitals, and have spent many hours helping patients understand and control their angina. It is our hope that this booklet will give you, your family, and your friends the information you need to live a more comfortable life with angina.

Sincerely,

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Get Tough on Angina™ is an educational program developed by the Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association (PCNA).

For more information about PCNA, visit www.pcna.net

Health care professionals may order 50 free Get Tough on Angina™ patient booklets online by visiting www.pcna.net/clinical/orderform

Get Tough on Angina™ brochures in English and Spanish are also available to order for free, in quantities of 100, online at www.pcna.net/clinical/orderform

A Spanish version of the patient booklet may be downloaded by visiting www.pcna.net/clinical/angina

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Get Tough on Angina

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What Does Angina Feel Like?
Angina does not feel the same to each person. It can feel like:

- A crushing or squeezing discomfort in the center of your chest
- Chest pressure or chest pain
- Discomfort or pain in your jaw, teeth, shoulder, or upper back
- Unusual shortness of breath
- Discomfort or pain down your arm that may make your arm feel numb
- A burning feeling under your breastbone (can feel like heart burn)

You should know what your angina feels like. If you know how your angina feels, it will help you understand:

- What physical activities cause your angina
- If you get angina when you are stressed
- When your angina gets worse or happens more often
- When to stop and rest
- When to take medicine like nitroglycerine (NTG) to treat your angina
- When to call your doctor or nurse about different or worse symptoms
What to do if Your Angina Changes

Angina usually goes away when you rest or take a medicine called nitroglycerin (NTG). We will tell you more about NTG later in this booklet on page 13. If your angina does not go away with rest and NTG, you may be having a heart attack. In this case, you should follow the “Signals for Action” below.

Signals for Action

1. Always carry NTG with you and use it as you are told.
2. If you don’t have a prescription for NTG, talk to your doctor or nurse.
3. When you get angina, stop what you are doing and rest. If your angina does not go away quickly with rest, take NTG.
4. If your angina is not better after resting and taking NTG, Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room - you may be having a heart attack!

Who Gets Angina

Most people with angina have heart disease, which is caused by the build-up of fatty deposits in the arteries going to the heart. Reducing your risk factors may help you control your angina and prevent a heart attack.

Risk Factors You Can Control Include:

- Cigarette smoking
- High blood pressure (normal is less than 120/80 mmHg)
- Blood fats:
  - High LDL (bad cholesterol) of over 100 mg/dL
  - Low HDL (good cholesterol)
    - Less than 40 mg/dL in men
    - Less than 50 mg/dL in women
  - High triglycerides (over 150 mg/dL)
- High blood sugar (over 100 mg/dL)
- Being overweight (Especially if you carry weight around your waistline.)
- Not exercising
- Stress

Cigarette Smoking

Smoking hurts the walls of your arteries and increases your heart’s need for oxygen. You may reduce your angina if you stop smoking and you will reduce chances of future heart attacks. Your doctor or nurse can tell you about programs to help you quit smoking. Medicines may also help you.

High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure makes your heart work harder. Normal blood pressure is less than 120/80 mmHg. You may be able to lower your blood pressure by losing weight, eating less salt (sodium), taking blood pressure medicines, and getting regular exercise. If your blood pressure is normal, this will help you have less angina.

Blood Fats (ALSO KNOWN AS LIPIDS OR CHOLESTEROL)

Blood fats are a major cause of narrowed arteries. Blood fats include cholesterol and triglycerides. You can improve blood fats by eating a healthy diet, keeping your weight down, and getting regular exercise. Today there are many good medicines available to treat abnormal blood fats.
High Blood Sugar

High blood sugar (glucose) adds to fatty build-up in your arteries and leads to diabetes. You can prevent diabetes by eating healthy foods, keeping your weight down, and getting regular exercise. Medicines also help control high blood sugar. Keeping blood sugar normal is very important for your heart and health.

Overweight

If you are overweight, your heart has to work harder to pump blood to all parts of the body. Losing weight can help you have less angina. If you are overweight, losing just 10 pounds may help your angina, as well as your blood pressure, blood fats, and blood sugar. Eating less and exercising every day can help you lose weight.

How To Calculate Your BMI

Body Mass Index (BMI) is used to decide if you are overweight. BMI is based on your height and weight. For good health your BMI should be less than 25. (See BMI chart)

Lack of Regular Exercise

Regular exercise, like taking a 30 minute walk every day, will help your heart and body stay strong. It can also help you have less angina. Regular exercise can help:

- Raise HDL (good cholesterol)
- Lower triglycerides
- Lower blood pressure
- Improve blood sugar
- Lower stress
- Control weight

Stress

Less stress can help you feel better and have less angina. (See page 21 for more about stress.)
When you see your health care professional to have a test for angina, you should explain:

- What your angina feels like
- What causes your angina
- How long it lasts
- How often you have angina
- What you do to make your angina go away

Doctors use special tests to learn more about your angina. These tests and the information you give will help your doctor or nurse decide the best treatment for you.

**Tests You May Have:**

**Resting Electrocardiogram (EKG or ECG)**
A resting EKG is a “road map” of your heart. An EKG can show if:
- You are having a heart attack or if you had a heart attack in the past
- Your heart beat is regular or not regular
- Your heart is beating too fast or too slow

**Exercise Test (STRESS TEST)**
This test takes an EKG of your heart while you exercise, most often by walking on a treadmill. The treadmill slowly increases in speed and grade (like walking up a hill) to make your heart work harder. If your heart does not get enough oxygen during the test, you may have angina. The exercise test measures:
- Changes in your heart rate and blood pressure
- Changes in your EKG while you exercise
- Any symptoms you may have with exercise

Your exercise test will help your doctor or nurse decide a safe level of exercise for you and if you will need other tests or treatments for your angina.

**Echocardiogram (ECHo)**
An ECHO measures how well your heart is working (pumping). During the ECHO, a monitor (transducer) is held over your heart to measure if your heart is pumping normally.

**Thallium Test**
This test uses X-rays and a medicine called thallium to create pictures of the blood flow to your heart during an exercise test. If the blood flow to your heart is good, the thallium shows up on the X-rays. If blood flow to your heart is poor because of narrowed arteries, the thallium will not show up. This test also can measure the pumping strength of your heart. Other medicines may be used instead of thallium to do this test.

If you can’t walk on a treadmill to take an exercise test, your doctor can use another medicine, plus thallium, to look at the blood flow to your heart.

**Cardiac Cath (CORONARY ANGIOGRAM)**
An angiogram is a very good way to see exactly how blood flows to your heart. It often requires you to be in the hospital for 12 to 24 hours. A cardiologist threads a small catheter (hollow tube) into your body through a large artery in your upper leg or arm. When the catheter reaches your heart, the doctor injects a small amount of dye into the heart’s arteries. Then, X-rays are taken to show the blood flow to your heart. This test allows your doctor to see if you have narrowed or blocked arteries going to your heart.
Treatments for Angina

Angina Treatments
There are two general types of treatments for angina:

• Medicines to prevent or relieve angina when it happens
• Lifestyle changes, such as quitting smoking, lowering blood pressure, losing weight, and controlling risk factors (See Who Gets Angina, page 7)

Your doctor or nurse may have other ways to treat your angina.

Medicines for Angina:

Betablockers
Betablockers are used to treat angina and other health problems like high blood pressure and abnormal heart rhythms. Betablockers cause your heart rate and blood pressure to go down and reduce how hard your heart works.

Calcium Channel Blockers
Calcium channel blockers help keep your arteries from getting tight or narrow. Some calcium channel blockers also lower blood pressure, which reduces how hard your heart works.

Late Sodium Channel Blocker
A late sodium channel blocker, ranolazine, has been shown to be helpful in treating angina. This medicine does not affect heart rate or blood pressure. It helps the heart relax between heartbeats, which improves blood flow to the heart.

All of these medicines can be used alone or in combination to treat angina. Most medicines have few side effects. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you think you are having side effects.

Helpful hints for taking your medicine:

• Always take your medicines as you were told.
• Be sure to tell your doctor or nurse about any side effects from your medicine.
• Never stop or change your medicines without talking to your doctor or nurse first.
• Do not share your medicines with others.

Medicines for Angina:

Nitroglycerin
Nitroglycerin (NTG) is medicine used to improve blood flow to the heart. There are two different forms of NTG. Fast-acting NTG acts very quickly and long-acting NTG lasts for a longer period of time.

Fast-acting NTG comes in two forms: a tablet you put under your tongue or a spray for your mouth. Most people with angina should keep fast-acting NTG with them all the time. Fast-acting NTG quickly stops angina by causing blood vessels to relax and open up so more oxygen-rich blood flows to the heart.

When you begin to feel angina:

1. Stop what you are doing and rest. If your angina does not quickly go away with rest, put one NTG tablet under your tongue or spray NTG into your mouth.
2. Continue to rest until your angina goes away.
3. If your angina does not go away after 5 minutes, Call 911; you may be having a heart attack.

Long-acting NTG provides a small amount of NTG into your bloodstream all day. Many people take long-acting NTG so they have less angina during the day. Long-acting NTG comes in pills and patches.

You can take fast-acting NTG for angina even if you take long-acting NTG.

Nitroglycerin Tips

• Keep NTG in the bottle it came in.
• Always have a fresh supply of NTG.
• If your bottle of NTG has cotton, throw the cotton away.
• Do not mix NTG in pill containers with your other medicines.
• Keep NTG at room temperature; don’t let it get too hot or too cold.
• Keep NTG with you at all times.
• Get a new bottle of NTG every 6 months.
**Other Treatments for Angina**

**Angioplasty and Stent**
- **1:** Blocked Artery
- **2:** Angioplasty (balloon pushing against the blockage in the artery and making the blockage smaller)
- **3:** Coronary Artery Stent (a mesh wire that holds the artery open after the angioplasty balloon has opened the artery)
- **4:** Opened Artery (shown with stent in place, which remains in the artery)

**Heart Bypass Surgery**
Adding new blood vessels so blood goes around the blockage.

**Enhanced External Counterpulsation or EECP**
Putting cuffs on the legs that fill up and down with air; this acts like a pump on the legs and helps fresh blood and oxygen get back to the heart.

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**The 4 Es Can Cause Angina**
What causes you to have angina? Many people have angina when they **Eat** a large meal, **Exercise**, get **Emotionally upset**, or go outside in **Extremely cold weather**. These are called the 4Es. Angina may also be caused by high blood pressure and smoking. These are called “triggers” for angina. All of these triggers increase your heart’s need for blood. When your heart does not get enough blood and oxygen because your arteries are blocked, you may have angina. Note: having two triggers at once, like eating a large meal and then going for a walk, may cause you to have angina more easily and more often. Below is a list of common triggers for angina.

1. **Eating a large meal**
2. **Exercise & other physical activity**
3. **Emotions**
4. **Extreme cold weather**
**Take Control of Your Angina**

This section will help you take control of your angina and stay as active and healthy as possible. Keeping a record of your angina will help you and your doctor or nurse know if your angina is changing. A good example of a Daily Record can be found below and should include:

- The day and time you had angina
- What caused you to have angina, also known as a trigger (See Causes on page 15)
- The grade or how bad your angina felt (See “How to Grade Your Angina” chart below)
- How long your angina lasted
- What you did to make your angina go away

**How to Exercise Safely**

Daily exercise is good for your heart and your overall health. Exercise “trains” your heart to work better. Before you begin to exercise, talk to your doctor or nurse about what type of exercise is best for you. Try not to “overdo” when you exercise. A cardiac rehabilitation program can help you learn how to exercise safely. Your doctor or nurse can tell you if there is a cardiac rehabilitation program close to you. If so, ask your doctor or nurse for a referral to the program.

**How Much Exercise Is Safe?**

Everyone should get at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise a day, like walking, swimming, or biking. You can do all of your exercise at one time or you can break it up into shorter exercise periods. You can exercise 3 times a day for 10 minutes or twice a day for 15-20 minutes. Remember to warm up (slow walking or slow bike pedaling) before you exercise. Always cool down (slow walking or slow bike pedaling) after you exercise. Doing a warm-up gets your body ready for exercise and helps prevent muscle aches and pains. Cooling-down helps your heart rate and blood pressure return to normal.

**How to Grade Your Angina**

Rating your angina on a scale of 1 (mild) to 4 (worst ever) helps you know when to take action. If you have a grade 3 or 4 angina:

- STOP what you are doing
- Take NTG if your doctor or nurse has prescribed it
- If you still have angina after 5 minutes, CALL 911. You may be having a heart attack!

### Daily Record for Angina

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date / Time</th>
<th>Trigger (exercise, emotions, eating, etc.)</th>
<th>Grade (1-4)</th>
<th>How Long Did It Last?</th>
<th>Action (nitroglycerin, rest, other)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/16/10 8:00 am</td>
<td>After eating</td>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>30 seconds</td>
<td>Took NTG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Take Control of Your Angina

Strength Training

Your doctor or nurse may want you to include strength training in your exercise program. Strength training 2-3 times a week makes your muscles stronger. People with stable angina can begin strength training after 2-4 weeks of regular, moderate exercise, like walking.

A good strength-training program for angina patients has 12-15 sets of exercises that train the major muscle groups in your body – chest, back, shoulders, arms, legs, and stomach. You can do these exercises at home with light hand weights (3-10 pounds) or in a gym with weight training equipment. So you do not overwork your heart, it’s better to repeat the exercises more times with lighter weights rather than repeating the exercises fewer times using heavier weights. (See Appendix A for examples of strength-training exercises.)

NOTE: Check with your doctor or nurse before you begin a strength training program to be sure it is safe for you.

More Tips to Exercise Safely

- Dress for the weather. In hot weather, wear light clothing – not sweatshirts or heavy clothes. In cold weather, dress in warm layers.
- In very cold weather, cover your mouth and nose with a scarf when you go outside. Breathing warm air helps prevent angina.
- To reduce how hard your heart works, plan your exercise based on the weather. In hot weather, exercise early or late in the day. In cold weather, exercise indoors or during the warmest part of the day.
- Always drink more water during exercise on hot, humid days, and if you plan to exercise longer than normal.
- If it’s windy, slow down or go with the wind.

Take Control of Your Angina

Your Daily Activities

Daily activities such as housework, shopping, and work-related effort can also cause angina. If you have angina with these activities, stop and rest until your angina goes away.

Tell your doctor or nurse if you get angina during daily activities. Your doctor or nurse can help you create a better daily activity plan.

Sexual Activity

Many people have angina when they have sex. Be sure to talk to your doctor or nurse if you have angina with sex, or other symptoms such as shortness of breath or skipped heart beats.

For Men

If you have taken medicine to improve sex (like Viagra®, Levitra®, or Cialis®) and you have angina in the next 24 hours –

Do Not TAKE NITROGLYCERIN!

Nitroglycerin plus Viagra, Levitra, or Cialis can cause your blood pressure to fall. If your angina does not go away with rest or you feel dizzy or like you may faint, go to the Emergency Room right away (Call 911). Tell the doctor or nurse there if you have taken NTG and a Viagra, Levitra, or Cialis pill.

Travel Tips

Having angina should not prevent you from doing the things you enjoy, like traveling. Many are afraid to travel because they might have angina during their trip. Follow these tips when you travel:

- Take along all of your medicines and keep them with you at all times.
- Do not put your medicines in bags you plan to check.
- Pack extra medicine in case your travel plans change and you are away longer than you expected.
- Take a list of all your medicines with you.
Put Yourself, Your Family, and Your Friends at Ease

Feelings and Concerns about Your Angina

When you have angina, you may feel afraid, frustrated, depressed, or really upset. You may think, “When will I have my next angina attack?” or “Will I have a heart attack or die?” Many people stop exercising so they do not have angina, and then are upset they cannot do more physical activities. These are all common feelings for people who live with angina.

To help you with your feelings about angina, follow this advice:

- Share your feelings with friends and family members.
- Do your daily activities a little slower.
- Learn and practice daily relaxation exercises such as yoga and deep breathing.
- Always take your angina medicines as told.
- Discuss any changes in your angina with your doctor or nurse as soon as possible.

Family Members and Friends Can Help by:

- Having a plan for getting medical help.
- Asking you to tell them if your angina is changing.
- Helping you to follow a healthy diet and get regular exercise.
- Helping you stop smoking. And if they smoke, they can also stop smoking.
- Being a good listener and talking to you about how you feel when you have angina.
- Learning cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) so they can help in an emergency.

How to Lower Your Stress

When you are under stress, your blood pressure and heart rate go up. This makes your heart work harder. Activities such as yoga, deep breathing, walking, listening to music, and talking to friends can help lower your stress. Having less stress will help you have less angina.

Some Things You Can Do to Keep Stress Under Control

- You can change how you feel about things. For example, if being late to an appointment causes you stress, you can plan ahead by leaving earlier so you aren’t rushed or late.
- Change how you think about stress. Ask yourself, “Does this really matter? What will I think of this a year from now?”
- Try to stay away from stressful situations such as rush-hour traffic. While you may not be able to avoid all stressful situations, like a family argument, you can usually walk away for a few minutes, take some deep breaths, and wait until you have calmed down.

Positive Habits That Lower Stress

1. Take a few minutes out of your schedule to relax each day.
2. Get regular exercise such as walking.
3. Get 6 to 8 hours of sleep at night.
4. Enjoy things that bring you pleasure such as reading, visiting with friends, or starting a new hobby.
5. Try to manage your time better.
6. Learn to laugh at stressful things that are not important or just “put them behind you.”
Put Yourself, Your Family, and Your Friends at Ease

Manage Your Stress as You Learn to Relax

Some quick and easy exercises to help you relax are included in Appendix B. You can do them almost anywhere.

Talk with Your Doctor or Nurse

Your doctor or nurse wants to know about your angina. Your doctor or nurse may ask:

- What does your angina feel like? (Is it a burning, tightness or pressure? Is it in your neck, shoulders, jaw, back, down your arms, elbows?)
- What causes your angina?
- How long does it last? (1-2 minutes or longer?)
- How often do you have angina? (once a day, once a week?)
- What makes your angina go away?

Your Doctor or Nurse also Wants to Know

- When does your angina occur? (at rest, with exercise, at night when you’re sleeping?)
- What stops your angina? (rest and/or nitroglycerin?)
- Has your angina changed?
- How much is your angina causing you to change your daily activities?
- What medicines do you take when you have angina?

You may have other questions for your doctor or nurse, including questions about sex. Write down your questions before your visit so you won’t forget to ask them. It’s also helpful to take notes during the visit to help you remember what you and your doctor or nurse talked about.

Living a Healthy Life

Angina can change your life; at times in small ways, at times in big ways. But you can find ways to live a full, active, and healthy life with LESS angina. We hope this booklet and the tips below will help you.

Top Ten Tips for Living with Angina from the Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association

1. Have a routine for your daily activities and for taking your medicines.
2. Pace yourself. If you have angina, slow down or rest before going back to your activity.
3. Get regular exercise. Find exercises that feel good and do them daily.
4. Control your risk factors. Make sure your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar are under control. Stop smoking. Try to keep your body weight normal.
5. Learn ways to manage your stress. Getting a good night’s sleep (about 8 hours) can help.
6. Tell your doctor or nurse how your angina feels and if your angina changes in any way. Your doctor or nurse can’t help you if you don’t let him or her know what’s going on.
7. Keep a written list of every medicine and the dose you take. This means your prescribed medicines AND over-the-counter medicines (like aspirin or cold medicines). This also means all vitamin, mineral, and herbal supplements you take.
8. Take your list of medicines to all your health visits and show it to every doctor, nurse, or other health care professional you see.
9. Always keep fresh nitroglycerin (NTG) with you. Make sure family members know where you keep it.
10. Share your feelings with your family members and friends. They know you have angina and that it may bother you. If you try to hide your feelings, your family may feel shut out and worry more.
Work up slowly by doing each exercise 12-15 times, rest, and then repeat. Breathing patterns are important during strength training. Always exhale (breath out) with an exercise and inhale (breath in) as you relax. Never strain, since this puts added work on the heart. Check with your doctor or nurse before you begin a strength training program to be sure it is safe for you.

1. **Chest Press**
   - **Muscles used:**
     - Chest, front of shoulders, back of arms
   - **Body position:**
     - Lie down with knees bent
     - Hold weight in each hand at chest level
   - **Movement:**
     - Press upward from shoulders, then slowly return to start position.

2. **Shoulder Press**
   - **Muscles used:**
     - Shoulders, back of arms
   - **Body position:**
     - Stand tall, stomach pulled in
     - Hold weight in each hand at shoulder level
   - **Movement:**
     - Raise weights above your head without letting your back arch, then slowly return to start position.

3. **Biceps Curl**
   - **Muscles used:**
     - Upper and lower arm muscles
   - **Body position:**
     - May do while sitting or standing
     - Hold weights with palms up
     - Keep arms and back straight
   - **Movement:**
     - Bend elbows and curl your arms up until the weights nearly touch your shoulders. Do not jerk the weights. Slowly lower weights back to start position.

4. **Triceps Extension**
   - **Muscles used:**
     - Triceps
   - **Body position:**
     - Stand tall. Hold weight in each hand with arms above your head
   - **Movement:**
     - Bend arms backward at your elbows to a 90-degree angle then slowly return to start position.

5. **Pull-up for Upper Back**
   - **Muscles used:**
     - Upper back
   - **Body position:**
     - Place left leg and hand on bed, table, couch, or bench
     - Balance with right leg on floor
   - **Movement:**
     - Lift weight with right arm with a motion “like cranking a lawn mower.” Repeat exercise by lifting with left arm.

6. **Lower Back Extension**
   - **Muscles used:**
     - Lower back
   - **Body position:**
     - Lie face down with arms stretched overhead
     - Keep legs straight and resting on floor or mat
   - **Movement:**
     - Lift upper body as high as you can
     - Tighten the muscles in buttocks and try to hold position for 10 seconds
     - Return to start position
### Strength Training Exercises

#### 7 Abdominal Crunch

**Muscles used:**
- Abdominals

**Body position:** *Easier Method:*
- Lie on back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor, arms across your chest

**Movement:**
- Squeeze stomach muscles to lift shoulders and head off floor just 1 or 2 inches.
- Slowly lower shoulders back to floor

**Body position:** *Harder Method:*
- Same as easier method, but with hands behind the head

**Movement:**
- Same as above. Don’t pull on head or neck.

#### 8 Quadriceps Extension or Leg Press

**Muscles used:**
- Front and back of thighs, hips

**Body position:**
- Hold weight in each hand at side of body
- Place feet 18 to 20 inches apart, toes pointed forward

**Movement:**
- Keeping body as erect as you can, bend knees and lower body ¼ to ½ of the way down
- Do not let heels come off the floor. Squeeze hips and back of thighs. Return to start position.

#### 9 Calf Raises

**Muscles used:**
- Back of lower leg

**Body position:**
- Sit with weights supported on thighs and with ball of foot on a thick book or 2- to 3-inch thick board.

**Movement:**
- Press your heels up as high as you can, squeezing the calf muscles. Then slowly lower back to floor.

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### Life Skills: Relaxation Through Breathing

#### Purpose
- Learning to relax and manage your stress helps your heart.
- This simple breathing exercise can balance your nervous system and help you relax.

#### Belly Breathing
- Think that your belly is a big balloon and you are slowly filling it with air.
- Place your hands on your belly while you slowly breathe in and out.
- Watch your hands rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out.
- Focus on your belly while you continue to breathe slowly and deeply.
- Relaxation is the calm and peaceful feeling you get from Belly Breathing.

#### Practice
Set aside at least 10 minutes every day to practice Belly Breathing.

#### Tips
- When you feel stressed, practice Belly Breathing.
- You can practice anywhere or at any time such as when you are:
  - Watching TV
  - Taking a bath
  - Standing in line at the grocery store
  - Stuck in traffic
  - Cooking
  - During times of stress
  - Walking
  - When you want to relax

*Adapted from: Fletcher BJ, Cantwell JD, Fletcher, GF. Exercise for Heart and Health. Atlanta, Ga. Pritchett and Hull Assoc., Inc., 2009. Illustrations adapted by Adam Rosenberg.*
Life Skills: Tense to Relax

Purpose

• To understand the difference between tension and relaxation
• To relax deeply and fully

Guided Practice

1. Take 2 full, slow, and deep belly breaths.
2. As you breathe in a third time, fully tighten your left arm from your shoulder to your hand.
3. Hold your breath and keep your arm tensed for 2-3 seconds.
4. As you breathe out, let your arm totally relax.
5. Repeat Steps 1-4 with your right arm, legs (each one at a time) and then your entire body.
6. Say to yourself something positive like:
   - “I have all the time in the world”
   - “I am relaxed and at peace”

Tips

• When you tense your muscles, really TENSE them. When you relax, really RELAX.
• When you breathe in, fill your belly up with air.
• When you breathe out, focus on your belly becoming soft.
• Remind yourself how calm and relaxed you are and that you can relax at any time. Notice how it feels to be relaxed.

Life Skills: Learn to Like Your Life

Purpose

• Think about the good things in your life. This will give you a warm feeling inside.
• That warm feeling will help you feel more peaceful and less stressed.
• Thinking about positive things is even better when you also do belly breathing.

Create a Warm and Positive Feeling

• Think about someone you love for 15-30 seconds.
• Think about a place you find beautiful for 15-30 seconds.
• Think about something kind that someone did for you for 15-30 seconds.

Practice

Before you begin your day’s activities:

• Write down or make a mental note of the things you need to get done during the day.
• Include two things you will think about that give you a warm and good feeling inside (like someone you love).

During a stressful time:

• Take two slow deep belly breaths
• When you breathe in for your third breath think about:
  - Someone you love
  - A beautiful place
  - An act of kindness towards you

Tips

• When you think of a person you love, think of why you love them.
• When you think of a place, think about what makes this place special or beautiful to you.
• When you think about a kind act, think about what made this act so kind.
• Notice the good feelings that come from thinking about your life’s blessings.
Life Skills: Learn to Pat Yourself on the Back

Purpose

• Notice the many good things you do.
• Learn to like yourself.
• Remind yourself that you work hard and are worthy of praise.

Why Is This So Hard?

• It’s easy to forget how much good we do.
• We are often criticized for things we do wrong rather than praised for things we do right.
• It is hard to admit that we do many things well.
• People confuse pride in a job well done with showing off.

Guided Practice

Reflect back on your day:

1. Think of one or two things that you did that were helpful or that you did well.
2. Like yourself for the things you do that help others.
3. Like yourself for your talents and skills.