



Our ancestors' survival depended on their fight or flight instincts, their ability to react quickly, battle predators, and run. This instinct remains inside us, even though we don't have to battle and hunt to survive. Nowadays, something as simple as a spelling test or a rude comment can trigger our fight or flight instinct, causing our heart-rate to rise, our body to start sweating, and our muscles to tense. This kind of everyday stress can shorten our lives. But we can learn to control our own body through breathing and relaxation techniques. Let's see how much control you have over your body.

First, learn to take your pulse. Place your index and middle finger on the side of your jaw bone below your ear. Tip your head back and slide those fingers down into the groove along the neck. Press in to find your pulse, the beating of your heart. Count to yourself silently. Then count how many beats you hear in fifteen seconds. Multiply this by four to get your heart rate for a minute.

1. Take your pulse, the number of beats in a minute: \_\_\_\_\_ This is a baseline. Your resting pulse.

Now watch how your body handles stress. Close your eyes and imagine a situation that is very stressful for you. Imagine the entire situation from start to finish. Imagine giving a speech or getting arrested or asking someone on a date. Feel your stomach tighten, your muscles tense, your body heat up. This means your heart rate is rising.

Take your pulse again in this anxious state: \_\_\_\_\_. This is your heart after mild stress.

2. Now use these steps to lower your pulse back down.
- **First, breath through your nose.**
  - **Relax your body . Make sure you have no muscles that are tense.**
  - **Slow down your breathing down by lengthening both your inhale and exhale.**
  - **Pause very slightly at the end of each inhale and exhale.**
  - **Stretch your exhale out as long as is comfortable.**

Take your pulse again after using these techniques: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Now try one more technique. Do a short burst of activity to raise your heart back up. Run in place. Do some pushups or jumping jacks.

Take your pulse in this active state: \_\_\_\_\_

Now use the controlled breathing techniques to drop your rate down again. Take it after one minute of relaxation and breath-control.

Take your pulse one more time: \_\_\_\_\_

\*By using breath control techniques, you have more control over how much stress your body takes in. Relaxing your body during times of significant stress can have a great impact on your mental, physical, and long-term health. Try these techniques the next time you have an exam or feel stressed out by life at home, work, or school.