



## Forget Deep Breathing

April Clay

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### Forget Deep Breathing:

## 7 Other ways to Combat Show Ring Nerves

*by April Clay, Psychologist*

“Just relax”. Don’t you just hate those two little words?

Of course you would relax if only you knew how. Commanding yourself doesn’t work- but there are other ways. Strategies that don’t have to do with deep breathing or Zen postures.

1. **Call it what it is** (normal): Your body needs to activate itself in order to perform. The uncomfortable physical sensations do have a purpose- sending blood flow to your muscles, sharpening your vision, focusing your mind. Re-frame your nervousness as your body preparing for action.
2. **Change your response to your fear** : Sometimes, we get so used to responding in fear we forget there are other choices. Try a smile (yes they are powerful), or perhaps a different approach, like “bring it on”. Because really, you are trained and you are ready.
3. Typically, when we’re nervous or stressed, our attention goes inward. You know, just so you can look at all those scary thoughts and images and freak yourself out. No! **Find an anchor for your focus outside of yourself.** Try- your horse’s needs. What does he need from you today to feel confident?
4. **Perspective:** It’s just another competition among many. Remember the task remains the same. One show at a time, one class at a time, one fence at a time.
5. **Watch your language!** “Don’ts” don’t work. Your brain will go to the thing you are saying don’t do and focus on it more. So- “ don’t be nervous” or “don’t screw up” “ doesn’t work-enough said! Talk to yourself in terms of what you want TO DO.
6. **Consider modifying your target-** Make sure you have set a goal that is appropriate and under your control. Getting too stuck on outcomes (placings etc.) will drive your pressure



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up. If you focus on process goals like pace control or riding the corners it will help you stay calm and focused.

7. **Power up your pose:** Roll those shoulders back, lift your chin, eyes up. Research has revealed that holding such a pose for as little as two minutes changes your physiology, lowering levels of the "stress" hormone. In other words, your body and mind will feel a surge of well-being and confidence. Pretty handy stuff when it comes to performing.

Want more mental training tips and courses to improve your ride? Try [www.ridingoutofyourmind.com](http://www.ridingoutofyourmind.com) and [www.outofyourmindcourses.com](http://www.outofyourmindcourses.com)