

Health

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Utilizing the proper breathing technique can help you heal

It is a bit unusual to us in the western world to consider the importance of breathing techniques. After all, we are always breathing, aren't we? It seems a little silly to put extra attention to something we do naturally. Notice your own breathing. Isn't each breath actually very shallow? Does your posture or position encourage or restrict your ability to take full breaths?

The presence of special breathing practices in the ancient cultures has always been a mystery to people in the Western world. However, we need to understand what they have known for centuries: When we turn our attention to the breath and increase its volume, we trigger numerous beneficial physiological and emotional mechanisms. The breath is the source for oxygen which is the key element in the body's ability to produce energy, and the act of relaxed, full breathing helps balance the autonomic nervous system. Patients who use breath practice respond more quickly to treatment; and individuals who are well are able to remain more well, adapt to greater stress and have greater endurance when they keep breath practice in their daily self-care ritual. Deep breathing helps reduce tension and anxiety (and panic attacks) by sending a signal to your brain to slow down, which results in hormonal and physiological changes that slow heart rate and lower blood pressure.

The correct breathing technique is called diaphragmatic breathing (stomach breathing). We automatically breath this way when we are born. Diaphragmatic breathing uses the diaphragm muscle (a strong dome shaped muscle) located under our ribs and above our stomach. When we breath in, we push the muscle down, and our tummy moves out. When we breath out, the diaphragmatic muscle moves back to resting position and our tummy moves back in. There is little or no upper chest movement. As we grow older many of us change our pattern of breathing and start breathing through our chest. This can be the result of a number of factors such as the pressure on people to have a flat tummy, certain fashions, poor posture and of course anxiety.

To become aware of your breathing, lie down on your back and place one hand on your upper chest and one on your stomach. Take a breath and let your stomach swell outward as you breathe in, and fall back gently as you breathe out. Try to get a steady rhythm going; try and take the same depth of breath each time you breath in. Your hand on your chest should have little or no movement. When you feel comfortable with this technique, try to slow your breathing rate down by putting a short pause after you have breathed out and before you breathe in again.

Once you learn to breathe with your belly, you must practice, practice, practice. The first week, practice for only a few breaths at a time while lying on your back. Then gradually extend the practice time to a few minutes. When this can be done comfortably, start to practice while sitting. Then standing. Then walking. **IMPORTANT:** If at any time during the breathing training, you feel dizzy or light-headed, stop the exercise, rest and try again later. The breathing training is not about being tough or facing your fear, it is about learning to breathe to normalize the bodily functions. Diaphragmatic breathing takes a little getting use to if you have always been a chest breather. Take little baby steps in moving toward proper breathing technique - don't try to do it overnight.

Clearly, breath practice and relaxation practice enhance one another. You are in charge of how to bring these together. Remember to invent your own practice and have it be fun, even inspiring. At its least, diaphragmatic breathing can be an incredible healing tool that you can use right away for no cost to help you to rehabilitate your health and regenerate temporarily deficient and exhausted tissues, glands and organs. At its greatest, it can be the seed skill for enhanced mental and physical capability and the foundations for spiritual growth.