



The - Breathing Manual

Step 1

The first thing we're going to do is experiment with over breathing - or hyperventilation.

So sit down and take 10-15 rapid and very deep breaths.

Step 2

If you've done this correctly you'll feel the awful dizzy, spaced out feeling that you get from hyperventilation. This is the feeling of breathing more than your body or brain require.

Ask yourself the question – do you ever get this (or a more subtle version) of this feeling throughout the day?

If you do, it's possible that you are hyperventilating during the day.

Step 3

Lie down on a bed or flat surface. Get yourself very comfortable, and make sure that there's no clothing obstructing your chest and stomach. Loosen your belt, trousers – anything that might be tight around your abdomen.

Put one hand on your chest, one on your belly.

Take a breath. Which hand moves – the one on your chest or the one on your belly?

Normally, you'll notice one hand moving. Focus again, and notice finer movements of your hands. Often what you'll see then is that both hands move – sometimes at different times.

There'll be a rhythm. Sometimes as you breathe in the chest hand moves first and the belly goes after. Or as you breathe out the belly goes first and the chest moves after. Or vice versa.

Take a few minutes to explore exactly what is happening as you breathe.

Step 4

Having explored this, you'll have noticed how you can do chest breaths, belly breaths, and all variations and combinations of these two types of breathing.

The next question is – which organ do you breathe into? You are breathing into your lungs. It's important to know that the lungs are a huge organ.

They run from your shoulders, underneath your ribcage. They fill your whole chest cavity, from your back to your front. So your lungs are vast, and you breathe into your lungs.

So how can you do a belly breath?

The answer has to do with a huge muscle that is your most efficient way to breathe – the diaphragm. This muscle works away day and night. When you breathe in, you can use your diaphragm to draw the breath in.

And when the diaphragm expands to fill your lung, it expands downwards into your belly. This is a belly breath.

So if the diaphragm is the most efficient way to breathe, why do people do chest breathing?

Step 5

The answer is that chest breathing is for an emergency situation – to get as much oxygen to your system as quickly as possible. It's used for fight or flight survival mechanism.

It's an automatic response – the decision to turn on chest breathing is subconscious. You feel stress or danger – and chest breathing is switched on. The problem is that this same response can be used in stressful situations when you don't need to fight or flee.

This chest breathing is much less efficient than diaphragm breathing – and has many negative effects on how you feel. It tends to magnify pain, stress and makes it hard to think clearly.

To see a wonderful example of diaphragm breathing, go and look at a little 6 month to 2 year old baby, and watch how they breathe when they're resting.

Step 6

Now you're going to practise using the diaphragm for breathing.

While you're lying down, breathe in through your nose. As you breathe in, feel your belly expand.

If you find difficulty with this, try these techniques.

- As you breathe in, imagine that the air bypasses your chest. See your belly as a balloon that you're filling with air
- Try putting a book on your belly. As you breathe in, focus on lifting the book up.

Try this until you're 100% confident you can do a belly breath whenever you want to. In other words, you're able to turn on your diaphragm at will.

Step 7

Now we're going to explore a physiological relaxation response that comes from breathing in – and out.

Lie back on the bed and take the biggest breath you can – chest, belly, everything.

Become aware of how much tension there is in your body with your chest full.

Then slowly breathe out, and become aware of what happens when you breathe out.

Step 8

What you usually feel with a full chest of air, is a feeling of tension. As you breathe out, there should be a release of tension.

Now this is a physiological fact. As you breathe in there is a system called the autonomic nervous system that regulates your heart, bowels, temperature etc.

As you breathe in, your heart speeds up, your blood pressure goes up, muscle tension increases.

As you breathe out, your heart slows, blood pressure drops, tension in your muscles decreases.

The fascinating thing is that the state of relaxation as you breathe out is profound. Experiment with feeling the tension as you breathe in, and truly feel the relaxation as you breathe out.

Try waiting a few seconds in between breathes and try resting in that relaxation.

Step 9

There're just two more things to explore in this video.

The first is talking. When people talk, they tend to rush their breaths as they talk. This is pressured talking, and you end up using your chest muscles instead of your diaphragms.

A better way to breathe when you're talking is to pause, take a slow diaphragm breath through your nose. This makes your talking less pressured, and reduces stress in you and your listeners as you talk.

This is well worth practising on your own first, because it's very easy to forget to do this if you're in a slightly charged situation when you need to put your point of view forwards.

Step 10

How to best integrate this into your everyday life?

I would recommend getting a role of blank stickers from your local stationary store. Choose your favourite colour – a colour that for you represents relaxation and health.

Put these stickers in important places – for you. ie. Your steering wheel, your speedometer, on your computer, above your desk.

Each time you see that sticker, it serves as a memory aid to breathe with your diaphragm. You need to consciously bring this breathing into your everyday life – and this is an ongoing process.

Once you've practised you need just 2-3 breathes to change your state from stressed to relaxed. Breathing can become an important trigger to return to a conscious, relaxed state.

Step 11

There's one last factor to explore. All your core muscles – the muscles that hold you firmly when you stand, sit and move – all of these muscles are involved in core breathing.

If you are breathing properly, using all these core muscles, then your core muscles stability will be optimised. This helps with posture, and preventing trigger points from occurring.

So your breathing is an essential part of a strong core posture.