Proper Breathing Techniques Improve Overall Health

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Efficient breathing reduces health risks, including heart attacks

In Eastern cultures, great significance is placed on proper breathing techniques, and for good reason. Proper deep breathing :

- Lowers your heart rate
- Lowers blood pressure and cardiac output
- Increases blood oxygen levels
- Promotes clearer thinking
- Relieves stress
- Increases metabolism
- Improves circulation
- Supports detoxification

Proper breathing can even help prevent heart attacks.

In Western cultures, however, little emphasis is placed on breathing methods, which can lead to, or exacerbate, many health problems. Fortunately, changing your breathing habits is something you can do quite easily once you understand how.

An Exercise to Improve Breathing Technique

Here is a simple Far Eastern breathing exercise you can do to "train" your body to breathe in a more efficient manner. It will help your body better use oxygen, increase your energy levels, improve clarity, and prom ote an overall feeling of calmness.

Just follow these steps:

1. Start by counting how many times you breathe each minute. In a relaxed sitting posture, most people breathe anywhere from 15 to 25 times a minute. (After practicing these exercises, your breathing rate may drop to as low as five times a minute, with a greatly increased level of oxygen use.)
2. Lie down on either a bed or the floor. Place a fairly heavy book (a large phone book works well) on your abdomen just below your navel.
3. Breathe through your nose, inhaling in such a manner that you raise the book. When you exhale, the book should lower.
4. Continue practicing this until this breathing pattern becomes natural.
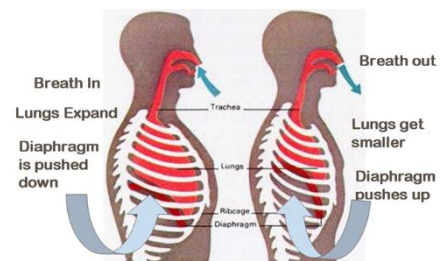
Although this is exactly the way we breathe during sleep—by inflating and deflating our lower abdomen—for some reason our breathing becomes more labored and inefficient during our waking hours. We seem to shift everything up to our chest area and breathe more shallowly.

Additional Tips for Better Breathing

Here are some more general rules for more efficient breathing :

- Breathe through the nose as much as possible. The nose pre-warms, moistens, and filters the air before it reaches the lungs.
- Stand erect with your hands to the side. Begin to inhale slowly and concentrate on allowing the air to fill the lower portion of your lungs first. To do this you must relax your abdominal, or stomach, muscles.
- While still inhaling, let the air fill the middle portion of the lungs as you let the rib cage relax and expand.
- Continue inhaling as the upper part of the lungs fill. As this happens, gently raise your collarbone and pull your shoulders up and back.
- Now exhale reversing the above sequence—that is, let the air release from the upper lungs by relaxing the collarbone and shoulders, then the middle portion of the lungs, and so forth.
- Make sure your breaths are even, and visualize each section of the lungs completely filling with air. As you fill the upper portion of the lungs, picture your chest expanding and your shoulders becoming more erect and higher.

Learn how to breathe properly, and I guarantee you'll experience significant health benefits for years to come.

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