

Connection between the Mind and the Breath

When the mind is agitated, so is the breath; when the mind is calm, so is the breath.
Controlling and quieting your breath gives you the ability to control and quiet your mind.
Agitated Mind = Agitated Breath...Calm Mind = Calm Breath

Diaphragmatic Breath –break the stress cycle



The diaphragm is the most efficient muscle of breathing. It is a large, dome-shaped muscle located at the base of the lungs. Your abdominal muscles help move the diaphragm and give you more power to empty your lungs. But chronic stress, anxiety, and chronic obstructive

pulmonary disease (COPD) may prevent the diaphragm from working effectively. When you establish a stressed breath pattern, shallow and rapid, air often becomes trapped in the lungs, pushing down on the diaphragm. The neck and chest muscles must then assume an increased share of the work of breathing. This can leave the diaphragm weakened and flattened, causing it to work less efficiently. The use of the accessory muscles (chest and neck) triggers a stress signal to your brain, calling for more stress hormones to release, thus feeding the stress cycle. By “breathing into the belly” (expanding through the abdomen when you inhale), you are creating more space for the diaphragm to contract and drop down, increasing the lung capacity potential and strengthening the diaphragm. A strong diaphragm requires less use of the accessory muscles.

SMOOTHING OUT THE BREATH:

Observe your natural breath

Notice:

*pauses
jerkiness
unevenness
or noisiness*

Make the breath smooth, even and as quiet as possible. Do this often throughout the day, eventually it becomes natural.

3 Simple Steps...

1. Lie on your back on a flat surface or in bed, with your knees bent and your head supported. You can use a pillow under your knees to support your legs. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.
2. Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out against your hand. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
3. Gently draw your stomach muscles inward as you exhale through pursed lips. The hand on your upper chest should remain as still as possible.
4. When you have mastered the above exercise, add a 10lb sandbag (bag of rice or beans will do), to exercise the diaphragm.



3 Breath Exercises For Anxiety

Below are three breath exercises that have a calming effect on the body and mind.

Observation of your Breath

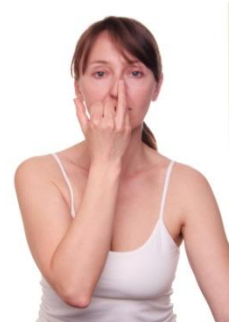


Sit quietly with as much length in the spine as is comfortable for you. With your eyes closed, and without changing anything, observe your breath. Do you have a very shallow breath? Does the inhalation stop, pause and then continue? Do you breathe into your chest, under your collar bone? Is your stomach still during the breath cycle? Does your stomach rise and fall with the breath or only your chest? Count your breath. Just observe, no judgment, no effort, just observe. There is no right or wrong. Make a mental note. As you become more advanced with your breath work practice, you will notice that your natural breath changes over time; deepening, softening, with longer exhalations and less effort.

Alternate Nostril breathing



Turn your right palm in toward your face; bend your index and middle fingers in toward your palm. You will be using the inside edge of your thumb and ring fingers to block off your nostrils alternately. Inhale through both nostrils, place your thumb over the right nostril. Exhale through the left nostril. Inhale through the same side (left), slide your hand to the right and block the left nostril with the inner edge of the ring finger. Exhale through the right nostril; inhale through the same side. Switch nostrils and repeat. Remember to switch nostrils before the exhalation. Start with a 30-45 second practice, work your way up to several minutes. To complete a balanced cycle, you will remove your hand (end) after inhaling through the right nostril. Then exhale through both nostrils to complete the exercise.



Bee Breath



Sit comfortably, with as much length in your spine as is comfortable for you. Take a few deep, smooth breaths, and close your eyes. Press the pads of the index fingers (not the nails) directly on front of the tragus (see picture to the left) to seal and plug your ears. Keep the lips lightly sealed, inhale through the nostrils, and exhale while humming, as if sounding the letter "M." Sustain the sound until you completed your exhalation. Inhale through the nose, and repeat the process, humming as you exhale 3-5 minutes. Eventually it will sound like a bee buzzing. This is a very calming practice and helpful to quiet the mind before bed.