**The Great Benefits of Deep Breathing.**

Deep breathing has many benefits for both the mind and body. It can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, improve focus, and enhance sleep 123. Deep breathing also helps to lower blood pressure, increase immunity, and expand lung capacity 45.

When you take a deep breath, you activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for conserving energy and regulating bodily processes such as digestion and urination 1. Deep breathing also activates the vagus nerve, which oversees mood, digestion, and heart rate 1. By taking deep breaths, you allow your body to fully exchange incoming oxygen with outgoing carbon dioxide, which can help clear out toxins and deliver oxygen to the blood at a greater rate 23.

To practice deep breathing, find a quiet place where you can sit or lie down comfortably. Inhale deeply through your nose, filling your lungs with air, and then exhale slowly through your mouth, pushing out all the air. Repeat this process several times, focusing on your breath and letting go of any thoughts or worries that come to mind.

There are many apps available that can help guide you through deep breathing exercises, such as Calm and Headspace 1. You can also try incorporating deep breathing into your daily routine by taking a few deep breaths before getting out of bed in the morning or before going to sleep at night.

Note that when you deep breathe and fill your lungs with oxygen, your brain and heart are the primary beneficiaries of the extra oxygen you are inhaling by deep breathing. Check this out with your doctor. There are only good benefits from deep breathing and no bad effects.

One of our Post members was recently diagnosed with “Chronic Stylistic Heart Failure,” and deep breathing has strengthened his heart, and with proper exercise and diet, his heart efficiency has improved in several months.

Note that if anyone has a heart problem, you should heed the advice of your heart doctor. Every heart patient situation is different.

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**Benefits of Deep Breathing**

By Karen Spaeder

Updated Feb 21, 2019

Reviewed by Lisa Maloney, CPT

Outdoor meditation

Experiment with different breathing techniques to find out which ones offer you the greatest benefits.

Image Credit: Marcin Wiklik/iStock/GettyImages

Every day, you take thousands of breaths without even thinking about it. The process of breathing in and out allows fresh oxygen to pass to the blood, as carbon dioxide is removed from the body. Deep breathing, however, is a mindful practice that provides numerous health benefits beyond the standard respiration required to live. With practice, you can train yourself in breathing techniques that reduce stress and improve certain bodily processes.

Understanding Lung Function

The lungs have a big job, sending oxygen into the bloodstream to be delivered to every cell in the body. As you inhale, the diaphragm contracts to take in oxygen. However, if you're not breathing deeply, the lungs eventually may lose some of their elasticity, causing air buildup in the lungs.

VIDEO OF THE DAY

This air buildup reduces the space in which the diaphragm can contract. The end result can be shallow breathing patterns that hinder the lungs' ability both to take in oxygen and deliver it to the blood. You also may start resorting to using the neck, back and chest muscles to assist with breathing, leading to muscle fatigue and soreness.

In contrast, deep breaths increase the lungs' capacity to push out excess air and function optimally. With regular deep breathing, you can expand your diaphragm muscle and the air pockets within your lungs. The lungs are then able to clear out toxins and deliver oxygen to the blood at a greater rate. With this oxygen boost, your body gets the oxygen it needs for exercise, proper cell function and a range of other bodily processes.

Read more: How to Strengthen Your Lungs

Deep Breathing Benefits

Deep breathing offers numerous health benefits, from stress reduction to a slower heartbeat and reduced blood pressure. It also promotes core muscle stability and helps you better tolerate intense exercise. It may even help lessen the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

We Recommend

Two focused young women running listening to music

FITNESS

HEALTH

Feeling Shaky? Try Belly Breathing to Calm Down and De-Stress

Additionally, deep breathing is particularly helpful for managing stress. Stressful thoughts may cause the "fight or flight" response, also known as the stress response, as a reaction to a perceived danger. With the stress response, the body's sympathetic nervous system alerts nerve pathways to trigger the adrenal glands, which then release adrenaline into the bloodstream. This adrenaline burst increases your blood pressure and pulse rate and may cause you to breathe short, shallow breaths from your chest.

The stress response is helpful in times of real danger — say, when you need to jump out of the way of a speeding bus. However, problems occur when your body is regularly on "high alert" and pumping out adrenaline even in response to non-life-threatening occurrences. That is, your body doesn't know the difference between real and perceived threats. So if you're experiencing money problems, for example, your body may invoke the same stress response as it would if you were standing in front of a speeding train.

If your body tends to default to fight-or-flight mode, deep breathing can give you instant relief. By breathing deeply from your diaphragm, you ignite the body's parasympathetic nervous system. This system reverses the stress response by slowing the heart rate, lowering blood pressure and calming the mind. With deep breaths, you can activate the body's relaxation response, a state of profound calm.

Note one caveat for those who have been diagnosed with mental health conditions such as generalized anxiety disorder: Deep breathing will not always help those with mental health concerns — in fact, it could have the opposite effect if you're not getting the results you desire. In these cases, cognitive behavioral therapy or hypnotherapy may be more effective in treating the disorder.

Deep Breathing Techniques

There are many different techniques you can try to breathe deeply from your abdomen instead of from your chest. Experiment with different exercises to see which ones give you the greatest feelings of calm.

For diaphragmatic or belly breathing, sit down or lie down flat on your back. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest. Breathe in slowly through your nose and let your belly expand, ensuring your chest does not move. Breathe out slowly through slightly parted lips, as though you are whistling. Use your hand to push all of the air out of your belly, and repeat the exercise three or more times.

The 4-7-8 breathing technique is similar to belly breathing. Simply perform the exercise above in the same manner, but add in counting. As you inhale, count to four, and then hold your breath for a count of seven. Exhale to a count of eight, again using your hand to push all of the air out of your stomach. Repeat as desired.

Still another technique is Ujjayi breath, a yogic term for deep breathing. This exercise is commonly used in yoga classes to generate internal body heat and to assist in quieting mind chatter. For Ujjayi, start in a relaxed, cross-legged position and breathe in through your nose slowly and smoothly — as though you are sipping air through a straw. Slightly constrict the opening of the throat so that as you exhale, there is some resistance as you push the air out.

Ujjayi breath should have an audible, oceanic sound. Note that you can combine Ujjayi breath with the other breathing techniques described.

Getting Started With Deep Breath

It's important to practice deep breathing techniques in an active state so your body can readily experience the benefits. You cannot properly and consciously practice deep breathing while asleep, for example, or while slumped over on the sofa watching television. Be sure to sit up tall or lie down flat so your diaphragm is not constricted and unable to inhale and exhale fully.

Even just a few minutes of deep breathing daily can help you to reduce stress, improve lung function and experience other health benefits. Start with about five minutes a day and work your way up to 20 or 30 minutes for optimal results. With practice, your body may more readily turn to deep breathing rather than rush to the stress response.

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We instinctively take a deep breath in whenever we are exposed to fresh air. Why is that?

Fresh air is richer in subtle energy called prana than our cooped-up office cubicles or any indoor space for that matter. The air in and around forests and oceans is especially prana-rich. Maybe that’s why so many people love hiking in the woods or vacationing at coastal beaches.

What can prana do for you? Higher prana levels equate with an increase in awareness, clarity, centeredness, optimism, positivity, contentment, and a feeling of lightness.

When you can’t get away to take advantage of these prana-rich environments, you can practice deep breathing exercises, anytime, anywhere, and improve your prana levels.

Deep breathing exercises

breathing exercises

Among all the different relaxation techniques out there, deep breathing exercises are considered by many to be the best. They provide easy and healthy ways to deal with stress and regain your calm quickly.

Here’s how to do a simple deep breathing exercise, and where to learn two more.

Diaphragmatic breathing

Since the lungs have no skeletal muscles of their own, the work of breathing is done by the diaphragm, plus the muscles between the ribs, the muscles in the neck, and the abdominal muscles.

Diaphragmatic breathing is also called belly breathing. Here are step-by-step instructions you can use to breathe your stress away.

Sit or lie down straight on a comfortable, flat surface.

Relax your body and take your attention inwards.

Put your left hand on your upper chest and your right hand on your belly.

Take a long, full, deep breath through your nose and fill your lungs up completely.

As the lungs get fully filled, your abdomen and sides of the waist expand. Your chest remains relatively still. Your hand on your belly gently rises.

Exhale slowly through pursed lips (as if your lips are holding an invisible straw in your mouth). Notice the abdomen is lowering and gently getting pulled towards your spine. The hand that is resting on your belly will gently come back to its original position.

Repeat these steps 10-15 times for the best results.

Bellows breath

Nicknamed Yogic Cappuccino, bellows breath, uses a vigorous inhalation and a forceful exhalation to increase prana. It expels toxins, while also stimulating the vagus nerve. You can learn this breathing technique by attending a FREE breath and meditation session mentioned below.

Three-stage breathing

This breathing exercise focuses on the lungs' lower, middle, and upper lobes (usually limited to athletes). Three-stage breathing expands lung capacity, increases prana, and directs that prana to specific areas of the body. You can learn this technique in a SKY Breath Meditation course.

Deep breathing benefits

Benefits of deep breathing for the mind

Helps reduce anxiety

Helps manage depression

Improves focus

Increases mental energy

Reduces addictive behaviors

Helps reduce PTSD symptoms

Benefits of deep breathing for the body

Healthier blood pressure

Useful with tension headaches

Enhances sleep

Increases immunity

Improves circulation

Increases physical energy

Expands lung capacity

Breathing trivia

a few deep breaths

We breathe 12-16 times per minute—that's about 20,000 breaths per day!

The average person breathes in the equivalent of 1.625 gallons of air every minute. That is about 2340 gallons per day. But most of us use only two-thirds of our optimal lung capacity. Learning to breathe deeply can help us to use our full lung capacity.

70% of toxins are eliminated through your lungs simply by breathing.

Your emotions change the way you breathe. Research has shown that your breathing patterns can influence the emotions you experience. Learning to breathe in specific ways can help you manage your emotions and your mind.

Breathing is the only autonomous system of the body that we can also control. This means that the body governs it, but we can change how we breathe through conscious breathing exercises.

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Take a deep breath

Though it may feel unnatural to breathe deeply, the practice comes with various benefits. Deep breaths are more efficient: they allow your body to fully exchange incoming oxygen with outgoing carbon dioxide. They have also been shown to slow the heartbeat, lower or stabilize blood pressure and lower stress.

To experience deep breathing, find a comfortable place to sit or lie down. Breathe slowly and deeply through your nose, causing your stomach to rise and expand. Exhale fully.

“Breathing deep for a minute isn’t going to improve your lung capacity,” Hoyt said. “But deep breathing is a good way to reduce stress and relax.”

Common breathing issues

One common issue that affects the respiratory system is asthma, which causes the airways to narrow and produce extra mucus, making it difficult to move air through the lungs.

“With asthma, it’s harder for the air in your lungs to get out,” Hoyt said. “If you start breathing quickly, you’ll stack more air in the lungs. Then you can’t get a big breath in.”

First-line treatment is an inhaled steroid, which reduces bronchial inflammation. Next, a long-acting bronchodilator can help by opening up the bronchial tubes.

Slow, deep breathing using a nebulizer, a device that produces a fine spray of medication that is inhaled, helps in two ways: the medication reduces inflammation, while the deep breathing removes excess air. “The medication helps, but breathing slow and deep is just as important,” Hoyt said.

With COPD, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, patients typically have two issues: chronic bronchitis, which inflames airways and results in wheezing, excessive coughing and phlegm production; and emphysema, in which the ‘leaves’ or alveoli of the lungs have been damaged, making it difficult to pass sufficient oxygen to the body.

Bronchodilators, inhaled steroids and other medications are used in treatment. Oxygen therapy may be necessary. About 95 percent of cases of COPD are attributed to smoking.

Finally, in pulmonary fibrosis, the alveoli become scarred. In most cases, doctors don’t know what causes the scarring. “Treatments have been disappointing, as there is nothing that reverses fibrosis,” Hoyt said. “But a few newer medications may slow the progression of scarring.”

To best care for your lungs, avoid smoking, embrace a healthy lifestyle and treat conditions that arise.

“Work with your doctor to address any concerns you have about breathing,” Hoyt said. “After all, breathing is critical to life.”