

## **WHY BREATHING HEALS AND CHANGES YOUR LIFE**

**"Yes, the breath keeps the body alive, but it is the conscious breath that elevates the spirit. Breath awareness anchors in each moment and opens us up to our true potential." -Tim Keim E-RYT, Yoga Therapist**

The most important facet of life is our breath. Yet we rarely think of it in this way. We could not survive long without the inhale of oxygen and the elimination of carbon dioxide from our bodies. Let's examine the quality of our breath and what type of breathing is best for us.

When you breathe you engage the diaphragm, a strong sheet of muscle that divides the chest from the abdomen. When you inhale the diaphragm drops. The lungs press against the abdominal organs to make room for filling the lungs with air. As you exhale, the diaphragm presses back upward against your lungs and expels carbon dioxide.

In contrast to diaphragmatic breathing there is thoracic breathing or "chest" breathing. This restricts the diaphragm's range of motion. The lowest part of the lungs are where many small blood vessels that carry oxygen to our cells reside. If you engage in thoracic breathing these vessels will never get their full share of oxygenated air. This will make you feel short of breath and anxious.

Deep abdominal breathing, or what is more accurately called diaphragmatic breathing, allows for full oxygen exchange and trades incoming oxygen for outgoing carbon dioxide. This type of breathing slows down the heartbeat and lowers or stabilizes blood pressure. Diaphragmatic breathing also decreases metabolic rate and blood sugar levels. It lowers pulmonary stress, muscle tension, fatigue, and the perception of pain. Diaphragmatic breathing normalizes blood flow in the lungs while improving the return of blood to the heart. It dilates the brain and coronary arteries, increasing blood and oxygen to the brain and heart.

When you change the way you breathe from thoracic breathing (i.e. chest breathing), to diaphragmatic breathing (i.e. abdominal breathing), your body's central nervous system more effectively signals the parasympathetic branch of the nervous system to slow down the heart rate and digestion. Diaphragmatic breathing is the healthier way to breathe.

**Now you understand how breathing works.  
It's a simple and powerful change you can make in your life.  
You can heal your body. Enjoy it!**

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Certified Yoga Teacher and Mental Health Advocate  
Founder of MIND HEALTH YOGA<sup>SM</sup>.

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