

Abdominal Respiration

You've heard the expression "sing your heart out." Putting aside the accepted interpretation of giving your all when you sing, this expression can also be interpreted as the importance of using the body when singing.

The quality of singing depends largely on breathing and does not solely require the upper part of your body. **Mastering breathing is the first step to mastering your voice.** It is therefore important to identify the mechanism and understand why abdominal breathing is important for singing.

Before seeing how the ventral part will intervene in the breathing circuit, let's first distinguish the two main types of breathing: thoracic breathing and abdominal breathing.

Thoracic breathing is the one that seems most natural to us, the one we all adopt automatically when the doctor asks us to take a deep breath, for example. You inflate only the upper part of your body, your shoulders rise, forcing tension at the level of the scapular belt. This is not ideal for singing! Instead try adopting, what's referred to as "abdominal breathing."

Abdominal breathing is the breathing that you are forced to control. You've perhaps heard of another expression, "breathe from the belly," which, in passing, is as prominent in visual imagery as "to have knots in one's stomach," both of which fall under an exceptional ability to contort the body. The visual imagery is therefore misleading as it is more about controlling the breath by soliciting the abdominal part than contorting the body. This type of breathing is the most natural to human, at least in the early stages of development; it is how babies breathe. Observe a baby sleeping and you will notice that their belly rises and not the thorax. You too know how to do it unconsciously too, since it is how we breathe when we sleep, without even realizing it! The major advantage of abdominal breathing is that it offers a bigger capacity of air and solicits the abdominal part first.

Let's test a few exercises to try to identify abdominal breathing and help it to become instinctive:

Awareness

Stand in front of a mirror, put your hands on your waist, your fingers towards your belly button and inhale. Without thinking, most people take in air by lifting the chest. This is not correct and results in chest breathing. It's your belly that has to move.

Lie down now. Put your hand on your stomach to feel it move. You can also grab a book - but for once, you won't find the answer in it! Place the book on your belly and watch. The book should rise with each inspiration and go back down at the end. Your ribcage expands!

Once you understand the movement, try doing it on command. Stand facing a wall, forearms against the wall, at the same level as your shoulders, your body inclined at

about 30°. In this position, abdominal breathing is done naturally. Do it for a few minutes and after a while, put stand up straight and try to prolong that breathing.

Master it

Breathing takes place in two phases:

- Inspiratory, to store a maximum of air
- Expiratory, to use the air during singing

During the second phase of breathing, which can be long when you sing, the goal is to control the flow of the expelled air, thanks to the diaphragm.

Imagine an inflated balloon. If you release the opening at once, the air is expelled very quickly. Now, if you control the opening by allowing just a bit of air to pass, the expulsion will be slower and continuous. Try inhaling deeply, feeling your belly swell, then exhale as gently as possible, to solicit the pelvic belt for the ending moments, all while timing yourself. Do it every day with a goal of adding one second per day.

A more rhythmic exercise

Exhale completely. Then stay in suspension on four beats. Next, inhale for four beats, through the nose or open mouth. Then, exhale slowly on eight beats. Keep going.