

Breathing is something that all of us do all the time, and yet most of us don't do it right. Deep Breathing should be a part of our everyday life. It not only can lengthen the years that we get to live, but can make us happier, more productive and energetic living them too. Breathing deeply is a great stress reliever and has a multitude of health benefits.

Deep breathing makes you calmer. Breathing deeply is the fastest way to stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, aka the relaxation response, which makes you feel relaxed. When we breathe shallowly, the body does not receive as much oxygen as it needs, and it makes our muscles constrict. The sympathetic nervous system is triggered when we feel stress or anxiety and sends out spikes of cortisol and adrenaline. It is the parasympathetic nervous system which counteracts this, and breath is the fastest way for these two systems to communicate. With deeper breathing you can turn the switch from high alarm to low in seconds.

Deep Breathing helps to detoxify the body. Our bodies are designed to release 70 percent of its toxins through breathing. Carbon dioxide is a natural toxic waste that comes from the body's metabolic processes and it needs to be expelled from the body regularly and consistently. It gets transferred from the blood to our lungs and we expel it with our breath. If you are not breathing effectively, you are not properly ridding your body of its toxins i.e. other systems in your body must work overtime which could eventually lead to illness.

Deep Breathing relieves pain. Studies have proved it yet when we feel pain our instant unconscious reaction is to hold our breath. Remember that breathing deeply and breathing into pain will help to release it. Deep breathing releases endorphins which are the body's natural feel good pain killers.

Deep Breathing helps to improve your posture. Bad posture is often directly linked with incorrect breathing. Try it yourself and as you practice breathing deeply watch how you naturally straighten up. Filling your lungs encourages you to straighten your spine and stand or sit taller.

Deep Breathing stimulates the lymphatic system. As our breathing is what moves the lymph, breathing shallowly can lead to a sluggish lymphatic system which is not detoxifying properly. Deep breathing will help get that lymph flowing properly so your body can work more efficiently.

Deep Breathing increases our cardiovascular capacity. By expanding our cardiovascular capacity from deep breathing, we can do more cardio easier, which also increases our cardiovascular capacity and burns more fat cells as well.

Deep Breathing gives you energy. Drawing air deeper down into the lungs greatly increases blood flow as this is where the greatest amount of blood flow occurs. This increases energy and also improves stamina. The higher oxygen content of the blood, which cleanses the body and all its cells of debris and toxins, along with better circulation, better sleep, stress reduction, your body working more efficiently, and all that goes along with these naturally gives you lots more energy.

Deep Breathing improves your digestion. More oxygen is supplied to the digestive organs and thereby helping them to work more efficiently. Deeper breathing also results in an increased blood flow, which in the digestive tract encourages intestinal action and will further improve your overall digestion.

More benefits? Deep breathing helps you to sleep better, lower blood pressure, relieves anxiety, reduces stress, helps with weight control and elevates mood.

How to Breathe:

Breathe deeply into your abdomen, not just your chest. Proper breathing should be deep, slow and rhythmic and done through the nose, not the mouth. Each breath should ideally last three to four seconds to breathe in and three to four seconds breathing out. Deep full breaths that fill your lungs using your diaphragm. When you breathe deeply your diaphragm muscle pulls your lungs down, so that they expand and really circulate oxygen down into the whole lung.

Breathe in slowly and imagine your lungs filling up with air: your chest slightly widens; your diaphragm pulls your chest cavity down and your belly button pulls away from your spine as you breathe in. When your lungs are full, exhale slowly and pull your belly button back in towards your spine to push out all of the air from the lungs.

Breathing deeply for just a few minutes every day will improve our mental outlook and improve our physical health as well. Breathing is something we all have to do anyway. Learn to do it well and make it a habit so you do it unconsciously and you will be happier, healthier and even live longer.

Deep breathing is one of the easiest ways to improve your health dramatically that you can easily do from anywhere, at any time. It costs nothing and takes very little effort. Take a little time each day to practice it and it will greatly reward your efforts.

Workout of the Week: Breathing Exercises

1. Pursed lip breathing

This one is super simple and easy to do, but extremely effective. The general idea is to breathe out for double the amount of breaths you inhale. Pursed lip breathing helps release air that's trapped in the lungs, and decreases the amount of breaths you take, while extending exhalation.

With relaxed shoulders, take a normal breath for about 2 counts. Then pucker your lips up (think of your mouth when you're about to whistle — that's what your lips should look like!) and exhale for 4 counts. Do this for a few rounds.

2. Diaphragmatic breathing

Also known as belly or abdominal breathing, this is the granddaddy of breathing exercises, as you're training the body to let your diaphragm do all the work. Your goal here is to breathe through your nose and focus on how your belly fills up with air.

You can do this one either sitting up or lying down; I find it's nice to do while in bed to help wind down. With your shoulders back, keep one hand on your chest and the other on your belly. As you breathe in deeply for about 2 seconds, your belly should stick out a bit. Feel the air expanding your stomach and then breathe out slowly through the lips.

3. Yoga – Alternate Nostril Breathing

To practice this one, start on the right side. Place your right thumb over your right nostril as you breathe in through the left nostril. Then take your right ring finger and place it over your left nostril as you exhale from the right one.

Leaving your ring finger where it is over the left nostril, inhale from the left, then switch to the right side, putting your thumb over the right nostril and exhaling through the left. It sounds a little funky, but you'll get the hang of it. You can easily see why people do it to help focus on the present - it's hard to think of anything else when you're wondering which nostril is next!

4. 4-7-8 Breath

This deceptively simple breathing technique is lauded as one of the best ones to help you fall asleep. In theory, it's easy. You exhale through your mouth and then close it and inhale through your nose for 4 counts. You hold the breath in for 7 counts, then release it in 8 counts, and repeat at least three times.

Because you have 8 counts to get the breath out in, you're forced to slow down your breathing which, in turn, slows down the heart rate and helps you relax.

5. Breath counting

This is another relaxation technique that will keep your mind from wandering too far. Sitting comfortably with your eyes closed, take a few deep breaths, then settle into a pattern of "normal" breathing. When you exhale, count "one." The next time, count "two." Do this until you have exhaled (and counted to) five, then start the pattern over. Don't count past five, and if you find you've lost count, start again at one. You'll be surprised at how much concentration it will take to keep yourself on count.

Summer Veggie Bean Salad

Ingredients

5 ears corn, husked (or 1 can sweet corn)
1 (15 ounce) can black beans, rinsed and drained
2 avocados, diced
1 bunch fresh cilantro, roughly chopped
1-pint cherry tomatoes, halved
1/4 large red onion, thinly sliced
1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and chopped
1/4 cup olive oil
2 limes, zested and juiced

Directions

Place corn into a large pot and cover with water; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until tender, about 5 minutes. Drain and cool corn. Cut kernels from cob.

Mix corn kernels, black beans, avocados, cilantro, tomatoes, onion, and jalapeno pepper together in a bowl.

Whisk olive oil, lime zest, and lime juice together in a bowl; pour over corn mixture and toss to coat. Refrigerate until chilled, about 1 hour.

Nutrition

8 Servings/Per Serving: 282 calories, 15.5 g fat, 34.4 g carbohydrates, 7.7 g protein

