

"Breathing for good health and happiness"

Perhaps you haven't considered that breathing well has the potential to make you feel good in body and mind? We breathe in and out 24/7 but rarely pay attention to the process.

I am speaking from experience, knowing that practising yoga breathing is a way to unlock our joy. This latter state arises independently of any external event. It is comforting to know that many of 'the answers' are within our own selves!



On a more practical level, practising yoga breathing will help you to feel **calm** and **relaxed** yet **energetic**. There are different practices to suit different needs. When we are stressed, we are likely to be **holding the breath in** and we can practice ways to 'even out' the inhalation and exhalation but also ways to lengthen the out breath to bring on relaxation.

If we are feeling lethargic, we are likely to be **holding the breath out** and we need, then, to focus more on the inhalation and to practise some energising breathing.

You can improve your breathing and your tidal volume with some simple yoga breathing.

Tidal volume is the amount of air that moves in and out of the lungs every time we breathe in and out. **Normally we use about one fifth of the capacity of the lungs - with yoga breathing, we can improve that to 80%!**

Rather than just trying to breathe for longer or more fully, we can use *physical actions* to help us improve our breathing. And we can divide the trunk into 3 areas:

- Upper abdomen - which is between the navel and the bottom of the breastbone
- Mid-chest - which is the area under the main part of the ribs
- Upper chest - which is the area directly beneath the collar bones

In learning to breathe better, we will breathe into each of the above-mentioned areas in turn (in isolation). We then learn to breathe into each area in one full breath, taking the arms out to the sides on the inhalation and returning them to the sides on the exhalation to help us breathe fully and evenly.

We can also learn to practise a cleansing breath to release toxins and excess carbon dioxide from the body. This practice will energise us.

Once you have mastered the complete breath, you are ready to start the practice of Pranayama. You will harness the power of the breathing to affect the mind; true expansion of breathing capacities to move towards a state where the breath is barely discernible and there is profound stillness in body and mind.

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