



A Whole Body Wellness Series Presentation

# *Breathe Your Way to Health*

Tap into your body's natural ability  
to restore and replenish...and feel **GREAT!**

# *Breathe Your Way To Health*

## ***Diaphragmatic Breathing:***

Your key to vitality, clarity, health and well-being

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# ***Diaphragmatic Breathing:***

## ***Your key to vitality, clarity, health and well-being***

### **Instruction Booklet Contents**

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## 1. Breathe Your Way to Mind, Body and Spirit Well-being

Breath is considered a vital part of health and well-being. It has been used for centuries to calm the body, center the mind and connect with the heart. Researchers have identified sufficient oxygen levels as a primary component of optimal health. Specialists in respiration and oxygen research suggest that most leading health imbalances can be traced to a lack of sufficient oxygen in the blood, tissue and organs. Research shows the majority of people breathe shallowly through their chest. This leads to a consistent lack of oxygen available for energy, mental clarity, emotional balance, and vital organ function.

Fortunately, you have far more ability to influence your health and vitality than ever imagined. Your breath is one primary means to improve your state on a day-to-day, moment-to-moment basis. Ongoing research validates what has been known for centuries, by simply shifting your breathing pattern you can significantly improve your well-being. Diaphragmatic breathing triggers your body's innate healing capacity. It is largely responsible for generating homeostasis and deep states of repair and rejuvenation. You have the power to initiate this response through your breathing pattern. It is that simple!

Breath is the master key to health and wellness, a function you can learn to regulate in order to improve your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. With every breath, you take in oxygen and release the waste product of carbon dioxide.

When you inhale, air is drawn in through your nose, where it is warmed to body temperature, humidified and partially cleansed. Your lungs are like a tree with many branches (bronchial tubes) that carry air to elastic air sacs (alveoli). The alveoli have the balloon-like ability to expand when air is taken into the lungs and contract when air is let out. Small blood vessels (capillaries) surrounding the alveoli receive oxygen and transport it to your heart. The blood that your heart pumps carries oxygen to your vital organs and body systems. An exchange occurs in which blood cells receive oxygen and release carbon dioxide, a waste product that is carried back to your heart and lungs and exhaled. This efficient method of transporting and exchanging oxygen is vital to sustain life. How you breathe significantly impacts the flow of gases to and from your body and therefore the degree of toxins you release. Chest breathing diminishes the flow of these gases to and from your body, while diaphragmatic breathing increases the flow of gases and oxygen exchange.

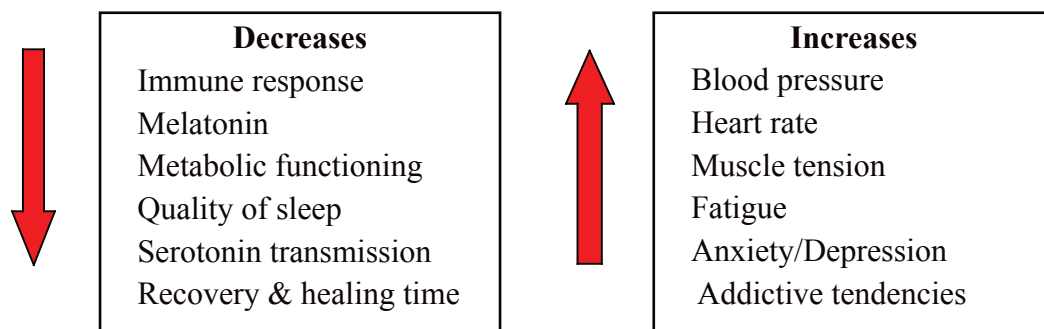
Breathing further impacts health and healing, because the way in which we breathe both reflects and influences the state of the nervous system. The nervous system has reign and influence over the health and functioning of virtually every major system and organ of the body. Much illness comes from imbalances found in the autonomic nervous system. When this system is not functioning in a homeostatic way it can produce irregular heart rhythms, high blood pressure, disturbances of blood circulation, stomach and intestinal disorders, urinary and sexual problems and more. Studies show that by working with the breath you can change and strengthen your autonomic tone and affect many important involuntary functions.

## 2. Chest Breathing vs. Diaphragmatic Breathing

*When you breathe you typically use one of two patterns:*

### Chest or Thoracic Breathing

Chest breathing occurs when a breath is taken and the chest expands and the shoulders rise. The abdominal area contracts as if being drawn inward. Chest breathing is shallow and often irregular and rapid, leading to insufficient oxygen intake. If an inadequate amount of air reaches your lungs, your blood is not properly oxygenated, your heart rate and muscle tension increase and the stress response is triggered. Chest breathing keeps the body in a more stressed state making it easy for any issue such as frustration, worry, impatience or discomfort to disrupt your level of balance. Research has substantiated that chest breathing causes a cascade of physical responses and adaptations that can have a significant impact on health and well-being. Such examples include:

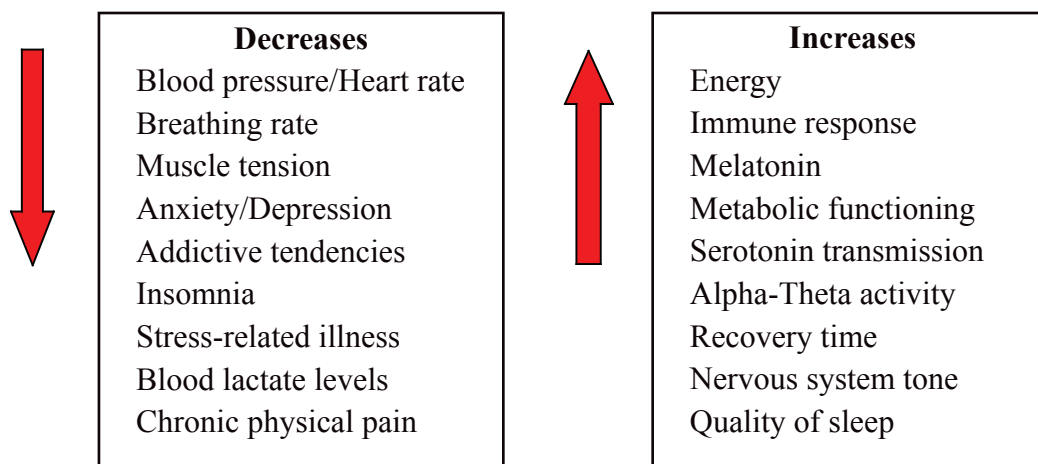


## Abdominal or Diaphragmatic Breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing focuses on the diaphragm muscle, a sheet like, dome shaped muscle that separates your lungs and your abdomen. Your diaphragm facilitates your breathing by expanding and contracting as you inhale and exhale. Breathing through your abdomen or diaphragm is the natural breathing of newborn babies and sleeping adults. Inhaled air is drawn deep into the lungs and exhaled as the diaphragm contracts and expands. Breathing is even and non-constricting. The respiratory system is then able to more effectively do its job of producing energy from oxygen and removing waste products. By increasing your awareness of your own breathing patterns and shifting to abdominal breathing, you can reduce many of the symptoms listed.

Diaphragmatic breathing initiates what is known as the relaxation response, a term identified by Harvard researcher Herbert Benson M.D. The relaxation response is the antithesis of the stress response. It is an integrated physiologic response originating in the hypothalamus that leads to a generalized decrease in central nervous system arousal. It creates virtually an opposite reparative response to the stress response. Numerous studies have documented the healing power of the relaxation response. Such examples include:

### 3. Benefits of Breathing Properly





## 4. Breath as a Spiritual Practice

Breathing is referred to and used in many spiritual practices as the primary grounding resource. Traditional and non-traditional teachings point to breath as the most important function in life. In many languages the words for breath and spirit are the same. The word respiration is derived from respirare, which means to re – inspire. Focusing on the breath is one of the most common types of meditation and relaxation. Focusing on diaphragmatic breathing is a powerful tool to connect spiritually, feel inspired and heal the body.

## 5. Create a Sacred Space

Although breathing can be practiced anywhere it is helpful to dedicate time to a breathing practice for 10 to 20 minutes each day. It is best to create time in your routine just for breathing. Do your best to give this gift to yourself by creating a quiet space of solitude for your breathing practice. Turn off the phone, close the door and put out the “Do not disturb sign”.

Create a sacred space in your home where you can connect with yourself, rest and rejuvenate. You may adorn this space with your favorite scents, a candle, pictures or symbols. Often people create an altar by using a table-top or dresser surface. The size of your altar is not important. You might have a favorite chair in front of a window or inside your home or in your backyard. Wherever this sacred space is located, it is important that it is a space just for you to be quiet and still.

## 6. Proper Breathing Posture Guidelines

Comfort is a good word to use when thinking of your breathing posture. ‘Com’ means ‘with’, and ‘fort’ means ‘strength’. Sitting comfortably therefore means sitting ‘with strength’.

- Find a comfortable position...standing, sitting or lying down.
- If you are standing or seated, rock slightly from side to side to establish the point at which your upper torso feels balanced on your hips.

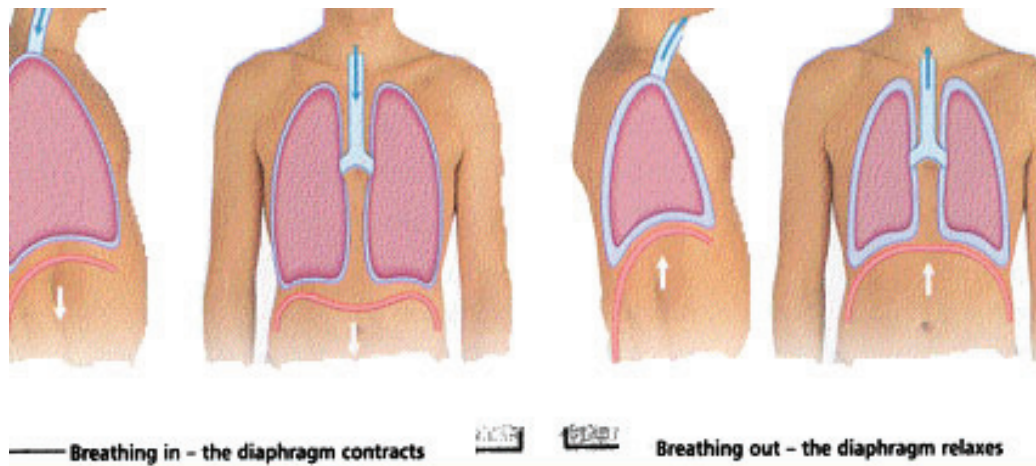
- Align your spine from your tailbone to the top of your head. Do your best to allow your back to rest straight but not rigid. You might imagine there is a string extending from your tailbone to the top of your head keeping your spine gently aligned. Spinal alignment helps you stay alert, but also allows for better circulation of your chi.
- Allow the weight of your head to fall directly down upon your spinal column. To accomplish this pull your chin in slightly.
- Close your mouth and breathe through your nose.
- Place your tongue on the roof of your mouth.
- If you are seated in a chair or lying on the floor, allow your legs to rest uncrossed next to each other.

## 7. Step-By-Step Instructions for Diaphragmatic Breathing

- Find a comfortable position...standing, sitting or lying down (see 'Breathing Posture').
- Place your left hand on your chest and your right hand on your abdomen (just below your belly button) to feel the expansion and contraction of your torso, which accompanies your breathing. Notice as you inhale which hand is moving up or out. Is it the hand on your chest or your abdomen? If you are like most people the hand on your chest is probably moving up or out as you inhale. This is called a chest breath. Chest breathing tends to be shallow and limits your full range of oxygen potential.
- **Inhale**
  - Inhale through your nose. Studies have shown that inhaling and exhaling through your nose maintains a more deeply relaxed state and optimum energy flow. Nose breathing helps you decrease the stress response, and allows for greater overall health benefits.



- If this is not your experience already, see if you can shift your breathing to your abdomen. As you inhale feel the hand on your belly rise filling the palm of your hand as if your breath were filling a balloon. Breathe down to your belly through the nose so that it rolls down and out.



- a. First, fill the bottom of your lungs as your belly expands. Visualize your breath as it comes in through your nostrils, entering deep into your belly and filling the lungs from the bottom.
  - b. Second, fill the middle of your lungs, feeling your ribcage expand.
  - c. Third, fill the top of your lungs. As you reach the top of your inhale you will feel your chest gently rise.
  - d. As you inhale breathe in a sense of expansiveness.
- **Exhale**
    - a. First, exhale by allowing your breath to leave your body from your lower lungs or abdominal region.
    - b. Second, follow with your breath moving up and leaving your ribcage.
    - c. Third, allow your breath to leave your upper chest.

- d. Your breath will move out from the lower lungs to the very top of the lungs.
- e. As you breathe out feel yourself becoming more relaxed and energized. As you exhale let out a gentle sigh as your abdomen falls.
- Continue to inhale and exhale finding your own rhythm. Allow yourself to feel the complete and total support of the surface on which you rest. Should your mind begin to wander at any time, simply note that your mind has wandered and gently and firmly guide your awareness back to your breath and the sensations of your in-breath and out-breath. Thoughts come and go. They flow and they change. Simply note them when they arise and come back to your breath.
- Don't worry if this feels new. It may take some practice for your body to adjust to this breath pattern. This is the most natural breath for your body, it loves breathing this way. It knows it is rejuvenating and being replenished with every in-breath and out-breath.

## 8. Healthy Breathing Intention Statements

- *I breathe-in relaxation and breath-out tension.*
- *My breath oxygenates every cell of my body.*
- *My breathing is calm and even.*
- *Breathing soothes my body and quiets my mind.*
- *My breath flows like the calm rhythm of the ocean waves.*
- *With every breath I am healing my body and mind.*
- *My breath oxygenates my tissues and organs.*
- *Breathing allows me to let go and rest.*
- *I am filled with energy and vitality as I breathe-in and breathe-out.*
- *My breathing clears my mind and balances my emotions.*
- *I breathe in life, peace and well-being.*

## 9. FAQ's

### ***What does it mean if I start to yawn?***

Yawning is not uncommon when begin practicing diaphragmatic breathing. It signifies that you have most likely been breathing from your chest, leading to lack of sufficient oxygen.

### ***What if I feel light headed?***

Similar to yawning, this is not uncommon when you begin practicing diaphragmatic breathing. It signifies generally one of two things: 1) That you have most likely been breathing from your chest and that your body is not familiar with having this much oxygen moving through it. 2) You are breathing too quickly or deeply at the present time and could benefit from slowing your breathing down or breathing less deep. You can build up to taking deeper breaths as you feel more comfortable.

### ***Is it normal to get tired or to fall asleep?***

So often the only time during the day that people breathe diaphragmatically is when they sleep, so yes it is very normal. Research demonstrates that waiting until sleep-time to get in your daily dose of homeostasis and relaxation is not enough. This is especially true if you are healing from a physical or psychological health challenge. Oxygen, nervous system balance and general homeostasis are key to healing. If you are practicing diaphragmatic breathing while lying down than we suggest sitting or standing. Also check and make sure you have good posture as this helps regulate your chi or energy flow from your tailbone to the top of your head. Finally, focusing on your breath requires a certain level of commitment to stay alert and concentrate. If you are still falling asleep you may need more rest.

### ***Is it normal for my mind to wander?***

It is very normal for the mind to wander. Finding it challenging to focus or concentrate for even seconds at a time is frequently reported when beginning a breathing or meditation type practice. On one hand, a busy mind represents the busy world we live in. On the other hand, it is normal for the mind to wander as we are constantly thinking. In the beginning of your practice it can take time to decrease the amount of busyness in the mind and increase your ability to focus. The most helpful tip for working with the wandering mind is to become less attached to the fact that it wanders. This is called taking an 'observers' stance whereby you simply

observe the thoughts as they come and go while staying centered on your breath. An analogy that we find helpful is to consider any distracting thoughts as clouds in the sky that are passing by.

***How can I be sure I am doing it right?***

As long as your abdomen moves up or out as you inhale and contracts or moves inward as you exhale then you are breathing diaphragmatically.

## **10. BONUS BREATHING EXERCISE!**

### **Calming Breath**

#### **“5-7-8”**

This is a simple breathing exercise guaranteed to calm your mind and relax your body. Focusing your attention on counting the numbers 5, 7 and 8, serves to occupy your mind, while simultaneously relaxing your body. Sound simple? That’s because it is. Give it a try.

**Here’s what you do:**

1. First, inhale for a count of 5
2. Then, hold for a count of 7
3. Finally, exhale for a count of 8

You can adjust the numbers to meet your needs. Lower the numbers to make it easier. Increase the numbers as your lung capacity and comfort expand.

Another popular breath exercise is the 8-16-32 breath. This is one that may require some practice and expanded lung capacity prior to it becoming one of your favorites.

**Enjoy the process of breathing!**