

Husband Mastermind Group

Bonus Lesson: Diaphragmatic Breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing is the healthiest way of breathing and is a first step in normalizing your breathing in order to manage anxiety or panic symptoms.

Diaphragmatic breathing is also the most natural way of breathing. Observe how a very young baby breathes - they will use their diaphragm/belly with each breath.

Years of poor posture, anxious thinking, tension and pressure will usually result in breathing patterns which are less-than-ideal and which will commonly involve:

1. Rapid, upper chest breathing... leading to
2. Over-breathing... leading to
3. Depletion of carbon dioxide stores

Relearning to use your diaphragm in breathing and to reduce your rate of breathing is an important first step in managing the symptoms of anxiety, anger, panic, etc.

The role of breathing in emotional and physical health

The principle role of breathing is, of course, to stay alive! One of the ways in which breathing does this is through seeking to maintain an optimum internal oxygen-carbon dioxide balance.

The important thing is not how much oxygen or how much carbon dioxide you have in your system but rather the relationship between the two gases - between carbon dioxide and oxygen.

Too much oxygen (relative to the level of carbon dioxide) and we feel agitated and jumpy.

Too much carbon dioxide (again, relative to the level of oxygen) and we feel sluggish and sleepy and tired.

Over the last hundred years or so carbon dioxide has received a loss of quite undeserved 'bad press' and for no sound scientific reasons. Rather than being a "bad" gas it's actually vital to our health. And one of its key roles is that of being our 'natural tranquillizer'.

Upper chest, rapid breathing gets rid of too much carbon dioxide causing us to feel agitated, breathless, and causing our nervous system to go into overdrive. In extreme cases this can result in tetany - the symptoms of which include a tingling feeling in the lips, metallic taste in the mouth, and sometimes cramping of the feet or hands.

Why use your diaphragm?

Imagine that your chest is a rather like a cone with the lungs lightly attached to the inside of this cone. And with the floor of the cone being made up of a large muscle called the diaphragm. It's the movements of the wall and the floor of this cone that result in the movement of air into and out of your body.

Being more like sponges than muscles your lungs cannot produce the exchange of gases required in breathing. They must rely on the contraction of the `cone' which surrounds them - in particular the floor of that cone which is the diaphragm. This is why using your abdominal or stomach muscles in breathing, which indirectly activate your diaphragm, produces better breathing.

Using mainly the top of the cone is called upper-chest breathing. Using mainly the lower walls and floor of the cone is called diaphragmatic breathing.

To check how you are breathing

Rest one hand on your upper chest and the other over your navel area. Breathe normally for a minute or so Notice which hand rises first when you inhale.

If the upper hand rises first you are using upper chest breathing. If the lower hand rises first you are breathing with your diaphragm. If both move at the same time you are using a mix of both.

Upper-Chest Breathing

If you mainly use upper chest breathing you have to breathe more rapidly in order to achieve the exchange of gases which breathing aims to produce. This

more rapid breathing results in your getting rid of too much carbon dioxide and thereby upsetting the balance between carbon dioxide and oxygen. And, of course, in your getting rid of your 'natural tranquillizer', carbon dioxide .

This is why upper-chest rapid breathers tend to be prone to over-breathing or hyperventilation - a potentially distressing condition that can result in a bizarre range of symptom.

Diaphragmatic breathing, particularly if accompanied by a slower and more shallow rate of breathing, optimizes carbon dioxide-oxygen balance by ensuring that we retain more carbon dioxide in the system.

How to use your diaphragm

Spend a few minutes a couple of times a day practicing using your diaphragm:

1. Sit in an upright position looking straight ahead. You can close your eyes if it helps you to concentrate on the process.
2. Put one palm on your upper chest and the other over your navel. (Your objective is to have the lower hand rise first when you breathe in.)
3. Breathe out gently and effortlessly. Now wait for a second or two until the body spontaneously begins the inhalation - this will occur naturally and of its own accord.
4. Allow the air to naturally flow in again until it stops, again of its own accord. Make no effort , whatsoever, to in any way deepen the inhalation. You are allowing your body to find its own natural rate of breathing and, through relaxing into the process, allowing your breathing to slow down and become more and more shallow. Remember your aim is to relax and to conserve your 'natural tranquillizer' - to counter the effects of losing carbon dioxide caused by anxious, rapid, upper chest breathing.
5. Continue doing this for about 5 to 10 minutes.

Common experiences

This slow, relaxed, and shallow method of breathing takes a little time to acquire.

Recognize that you are re-educating your breathing mechanism after what has probably been years of misuse.

Many people find that, initially, there is a fluttering effect in the diaphragm area. This is caused by anxiety and tension and will pass with practice.

Again many people find that they can only do this form of breathing for a minute or two at first. That's fine - accept this and keep to about a minute or two for about a week or so.

Gradually the time will extent, if you're patient. There's no point in forcing things - and if you've been breathing poorly for years then another week or so won't make that much difference -- just so long as you are moving in the right direction.

Some people experience sleepiness. (Incidentally, this is a great way of getting to sleep at night). This sleepiness is usually just your body trying to catch up on the rest and relaxation that it's been denied for so long. As you continue to practice this will and shallow diaphragmatic breathing this sleepiness should gradually recede.

Taken from Dr. Robert Glover - <http://www.nomoremrniceguy.com>