

Diaphragmatic Breathing

The purpose of this exercise is to reestablish diaphragmatic breathing as your normal, everyday moment-to-moment resting breathing habit. ***If you do no other exercise, be sure to practice this one. It is that important.*** It will be most effective if you practice at least three times a day for ten to fifteen minutes each time; eventually, the easy rhythmic motion of the diaphragmatic breathing will begin to replace the strained, unnatural chest breathing to which you have become habituated. You can speed the process by being aware of your breathing pattern as much as possible during the day, for the more aware of it you became, the more often you correct it (change from chest breathing to diaphragmatic breathing), and the faster you will replace thoracic with diaphragmatic breathing.

To Practice: Before you go to sleep and just after you wake up, place your right hand on your upper abdomen, with the little finger directly above the navel and the fingers spread so that the thumb is almost touching the chest. Place your left hand on the upper chest with the little finger between the two breasts. As you breathe, concentrate on the air moving down into the upper abdomen (as if you are filling your stomach with breath). The right hand should rise with the inhalation and fall with the exhalation; the left hand should not move. You should feel a slight motion in the lower portion of the chest cavity, but the upper portion should remain still. Within a few moments you will become more rested and quiet. Do not try to force the breath. Allow the motion to be gentle and effortless. Notice how easy it is to breathe deeply and easily, without any effort.

Benefits: This will lead to autonomic balance and a relaxed state, generally. After some weeks, depending on the individual, you will begin to notice subtle and gradual changes in your daily breathing patterns. Its movement will be more relaxed and rhythmic. As was discussed earlier, this leads to a greater efficiency of the pulmonary process and reduces the amount of work required for proper ventilation perfusion.

Even Breathing

While you are practicing diaphragmatic breathing, concentrate on making the breath very smooth and even. The inhalation and exhalation should be of the same length and have the same pressure. Do not exhale all the breath at the beginning of the exhalation. Concentrate on keeping the flow pressure even throughout the entire cycle. Eliminate all pauses, stops, and shakiness in the breath, including the pause between inhalation and exhalation. Imagine that the breath is like a large wheel moving through the body without any pauses or stops. It is often helpful to picture the breath flow as a completely smooth, even sine wave.

Benefits: The jerkier the breath, the more disruptive it is to the autonomic nervous system. When the breath is smooth and even, autonomic balance is achieved

Reference: Paul Neurnberger, *Freedom From Stress: A Holistic Approach*, Himalayan Institute Publishers, Honesdale, Pa, 1985

