

Just take a deep breath

For our survival, breathing is automatic. We do it without needing to think about it. But did you know that one of the simplest things you can do to positively affect your body, mind and spirit is to do exactly that? Something as easy as gathering your thoughts (centering yourself) and taking a few deep breaths before you go into that interview can help calm your nerves and anxiety. Probably because it is reflexive, we don't pay attention to how we breathe. But here is food for thought on just how important it is. Think about how long you can go without eating before you starve. It is about a month. You can go about three days without water before succumbing to dehydration. But you can only go about five minutes without breathing. So knowing that eating nutritiously is important for good health, what does this information imply about the importance of what and how we breathe? The answer is - very important.

The richest exchange of oxygen to the blood happens at the bottom of the lungs. So in order to capitalize on this we need to breathe deeply. That doesn't mean we need to consciously be taking deep, slow breaths all the time. It just means we need to be aware when we are breathing shallowly and adjust that. In order to breathe properly (for best effects) our stomach should expand on the inhale, and recede on the exhale. When our lower abdomen is extended it pulls on the diaphragm which pulls the air deeper into our lungs.

What are the causes of shallow breathing? There are many reasons. The most common is not consciously or subconsciously wanting to take in what is in your environment. For example, if someone were to scare you by shouting "Boo!", you might jump or be startled and you might notice that you even momentarily, reflexively hold your breath. The same is true being in negative environments. We tend to shut down our breathing as a coping and protective mechanism. The important thing is to do some deep breathing and releasing when we are free from the trigger so that we do not stay in shallow breathing mode. It is not uncommon for people who live in very toxic situations to even develop a reverse pattern of breathing where the stomach goes in on the inhale. Another cause of shallow breathing can be chemicals that are very subtly or not so subtly negatively affecting your breathing quality, which is good reason to use non-toxic and natural personal care and cleaning products when you can.

How else can working with breath help you? There are all kinds of different therapies that utilize breathwork. Yoga utilizes the breath to maximize the benefits in moving chi. If you are looking for making really big shifts in your life or consciousness, you can look into the many different types of transformational breathwork that are available. As with all therapies make sure your facilitator has a good reputation as serious breathwork can be intense. On your own, you can use mindfulness of your breath as a meditation or incorporate breath into your meditation practice. Simplest of all is, several times a day, take a moment to center yourself and just take a few deep breaths. The benefits are enormous! Just breathe.

"Inhale the future, exhale the past."

"Sometimes the most important thing in a whole day is the rest we take between two deep breaths."

"Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I smile. Dwelling in the present moment, I know this is a wonderful moment." - Thich Nhat Hahn

"You don't always need a plan. Sometimes you just need to breathe, trust, let go, and see what happens."

"Fully experience THIS moment - breathe in, breathe out - nothing more." Jonathan Lockwood Hule