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## **Deep Breathing**

by Mishelle Knuteson, MH

I have just started teaching Tai Chi and I love it. One of the first principles taught in Tai Chi is breathing. As Dr. Christopher taught, "The Lord put into us the breath of Life, but we have to keep it there. Shallow breathing is not much life, but full breathing is the full breath of life. Learn to breath deeply."

Breathing is a vital bodily function that is often ignored. Unconsciously, the body performs it's breathing function yet at the same time we also have voluntary control over breathing rhythms and volumes. In Tai Chi, a person pays careful attention to breathing in order to energize and efficiently utilize the power of the body or to calm and relax the mind and emotions.

If you watch children and animals they naturally breath with visible movement in their abdomen rather than the chest. Adults seem to have lost that natural ability for whatever reason. Lengthening and deepening the breath draws in oxygen to nourish every cell of our body and promote relaxation. Prolonged exhaling helps get rid of stale air and toxins in our lungs. Shallow breathing (chest breathing) causes a constriction of the chest and lung tissue which over time decreases the health-giving oxygen flow to the tissues of the body.

From HealthMad.com here are 9 health benefits of deep breathing exercises:

1. Relaxes the Bowels
2. Stress Reliever
3. Improves and Increases Oxygen Delivery and Supply to the Body Organs
4. Improves the Detoxification of body Organs and Cleanses the Body
5. Releases you from Anxiety
6. Promotes your Well-being
7. Improves your Physical and Mental Health
8. Can help relieve Nervousness

### **BREATHING EXERCISES**

The following exercises are simple ways to deepen breathing and to cleanse the lungs. These exercises will also increase energy and decrease tension.

### **COMPLETE BREATH EXERCISES**

1. Sit up straight. Exhale.
2. Inhale and, at the same time, relax the belly muscles. Feel as though the belly is filling with air.

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3. After filling the belly, keep inhaling. Fill up the middle of your chest. Feel your chest and rib cage expand.
4. Hold the breath in for a moment, then begin to exhale as slowly as possible.
5. As the air is slowly let out, relax your chest and rib cage. Begin to pull your belly in to force out the remaining breath.
6. Close your eyes, and concentrate on your breathing.
7. Relax your face and mind.
8. Let everything go.
9. Practice about 5 minutes.

### **The 4-7-8 (or Relaxing Breath) Exercise**

Sit with your back straight while learning the exercise. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there through the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward.

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of **four**.
- Hold your breath for a count of **seven**.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of **eight**.
- This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breathes.

Note that you always inhale quietly through your nose and exhale audibly through your mouth. The tip of your tongue stays in position the whole time. Exhalation takes twice as long as inhalation. The absolute time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed the exercise up but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8 for the three phases. With practice you can slow it all down and get used to inhaling and exhaling more and more deeply.

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**The Bellows Breathing Technique (The Stimulating Breath)**

This yogic technique can be used to help stimulate energy when needed. Sit in a comfortable upright position with your spine straight. This exercise can be used each morning upon awakening or when needed for an energy boost. If you are trying to lose weight, doing a few rounds throughout the day will increase your digestive power and help increase your metabolism.

- With your mouth gently closed, breath in and out of your nose as fast as possible. To give an idea of how this is done, think of someone using a bicycle pump (a bellows) to quickly pump up a tire. The upstroke is inspiration and the down stroke is exhalation and both are equal in length.
- The rate of breathing is rapid with as many as 2-3 cycles of inspiration/expiration per second.
- While doing the exercise, you should feel effort at the base of the neck, chest and abdomen. The muscles in these areas will increase in strength the more this technique is practiced. This is truly an exercise.
- Do this for no longer than 15 seconds when first starting. With practice, slowly increase the length of the exercise by 5 seconds each time. Do it as long as you are comfortably able, not exceeding one full minute.
- There is a risk for hyperventilation that can result in loss of consciousness if this exercise is done too much in the beginning. For this reason, it should be practiced in a safe place such as a bed or chair.

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