

Proper breathing techniques can make the difference in preventing many chronic diseases by improving the oxygenation of cells. Many of us are chest breathers; which can cause a slumped posture, stagnation of blood and lymph in the abdomen, reduced blood oxygenation, as well as fatigue our scalene muscles. When we breathe with our chest, we only utilize the upper portion of our lungs, which can only deliver 6ml of oxygen per minute to our tissues. Diaphragmatic breathing utilizes the lower portion of the lungs, which are 6-7x more effective in oxygen transport to the body tissues (mostly due to a richer blood supply caused by gravity). Here are a few breathing exercises for you to do daily, to determine how you breath and how to retrain yourself to become a more efficient breather.



Self-Test and Simple Breathing Exercise:

Place one hand on your abdomen and the other one on your chest. Allow yourself to relax completely so your breathing dynamic has little change (this is your usual unconscious breathing). Once relaxed, start to pay attention to your breathing for about 20-30 seconds. Then, take 2-3 very slow deep breaths to feel your breathing in more detail and note where your body expands (chest, sides, abdomen). Now that you have a better understanding of your typical breathing pattern, let's try to add Diaphragmatic Breathing Exercises to retrain your body.

Diaphragmatic Breathing Exercises (3)

1) Can you move your Diaphragm?

Start with one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen. Now take a deep breath in while trying to push out your lower hand with your abdomen. Try not to move your chest and ribs at all during this exercise and only use your diaphragm to fill your abdomen.

2) Abdominal Respiratory Exercise with Books

Start by lying on your back and place a book on your abdomen (phone book size). As you breathe, try to lift the book up about 1 inch with each inhalation (breath in) and then relax to exhale (breath out) and let the book drop back down. Focus and do not let your rib cage expand during inhalations. Do this for about 3-5 minutes before continuing into other breathing exercises to allow your conscious brain to connect with your diaphragm.

3) Diaphragmatic Breathing Technique with a Belt

Start by lying on your back and place a belt around your lower ribs (middle of the trunk) and buckle it snugly so that you cannot take a deep inhalation with your chest or ribs. Now, focus on slow deep inhalations with your abdomen for minutes to hours. This will help retrain your breathing faster by having the feedback of the belt to reinforce proper control of the diaphragm.

These exercises can be done together or separate. I recommend starting and finishing with the self-test to keep track of your progression and reinforce your control over the diaphragm. If you feel like you are unable to relax (inhalations) your diaphragm, we may need to consider a magnesium supplement to relax the smooth muscle including the diaphragm.