

eNews – Misconceptions about Breathing

Better Breathing, Better Energy, Better Mind

We all breathe, however we don't all always breathe properly, and poor breathing can lead to poor energy, fatigue, dullness of mind, or mental agitation and anxiety.

According to Yoga – correct breathing is fundamental to our energy and to a calm, healthy mind.

In Yoga we call our energy prana, meaning first energy or life force. One can imagine prana as the intelligence and energy, which helps everything in the body work in a smooth and co-ordinated way. Correct breathing is one mechanism by which we enhance our prana.

*The relationship of breath to prana:
Through the silken thread of breath,
we grasp the string of nerve impulses.
From these we grasp the twine of our thoughts,
and finally we grasp the rope of prana.*

Breath is also intimately connected to our mind and emotions. You may have observed that when you are angry or anxious your breath becomes short, fast and jagged, and when stressed you may even find yourself 'holding' your breath. Slow, gentle breathing can lead to a calmer mind.

So what is breathing? Leslie Kaminoff from the Breathing Project in New York, gives a simple definition "Breathing is the taking and expelling of air, caused by the changing shape of thoracic and abdominal cavities."

The problem is that there are many misconceptions and confusions about what the breath should be. Let's consider these for a moment and then consider what correct breathing can be.

Four Common Misconceptions and their Corrections:

• **Misconception 1 – There is only one proper way to breathe – abdominal breathing is best.**

Correction – Breathing will change according to the situation and need.

• **Misconception 2 – Belly breathing equals diaphragm (Breathing muscle) breathing – this is often used as method of assessing good breathing.**

Correction – The diaphragm has the capacity to both press downward on the belly to cause it to move outward, but it can also pull upon the base ribs, and so cause chest breathing. Thus the diaphragm is involved in all breathing. To determine what good breathing is, then one needs to analyse the total breathing function, not just one isolated area.

- Misconception 3 – You can control where breath goes by changing the shape of the clavicles, ribs or diaphragm.

Correction – The lungs are much like a balloon – when you expand the thoracic cavity (in whatever way) you create a low pressure area or suction, so that air will flow into the lungs, wherever the airways are open, regardless of which area is expanded.

- Misconception 4 – Deep breathing and more oxygen is always a good thing.

Correction – Breathing should match the metabolic needs – if activity is increased, then deeper faster breathing is needed. If at rest then slower gentle breathing is needed. Over breathing can cause an imbalance in the blood, increasing oxygen and reducing carbon dioxide. Too much oxygen is harmful and can cause damage. Too little carbon dioxide can cause agitation, and can affect the control of breathing. (Much of breath control is by carbon dioxide levels.)

So what is correct breathing?

Establish NATURAL breath. The goal of breathing practice is to restore natural breath, and remove the things which get in the way of correct breathing, such as poor posture, poor breathing habits, stress and emotional tension, to name a few.