

# Learning to Breathe Naturally

1

The first step in relaxing your breathing is to form the habit of breathing in and out through the nose. When you breathe through your nose you slow the pace of breathing naturally while making the breath deeper. Nasal breathing also adjusts the temperature of the air, calms the nervous system, and cleans incoming air. Breathe through the nose at all times except during periods of peak energy need such as when you are out of breath from exercising.

Next, lie on your stomach in the crocodile posture. Learn to be aware of the two directions of your breath. The exhalation is cleansing and relaxing. The inhalation is nourishing and energizing. Let each breath flow into the next without pause. You don't need to make changes in your breathing yet. Just observe these two movements of breath, over and over. This is an important aspect of breath training that many people never learn.

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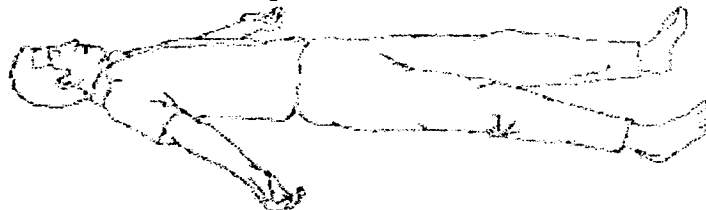
Now learn to recognize the sensations of diaphragmatic breathing. When you inhale, the back rises, the lower, "floating" ribs expand, and the navel region presses against the floor. When you exhale, all these areas contract. Notice that there is little movement in the chest.

To deepen the breath try this experiment. 1) For five breaths or so, each time you exhale slowly press the navel inward, exhaling a little more than usual. 2) After each of these exhalations, allow the inhalation to flow in deeply, expanding your lower back. 3) After five breaths, go back to normal exhalations but continue to let the inhalation be deep and smooth -- without blocking it. Your breath will feel deep and relaxed.

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Now roll to your back and lie in the corpse pose. Notice that in this position your chest is nearly motionless, and that your navel region rises and falls noticeably with each breath. Let your breathing slow, even though it remains deep. You can picture yourself on the warm sands of a beach, breathing in and out at the slow pace of the waves. Or you can simply focus on your breath and let it find its own slow, natural pace.

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At the end of the inhalation, when your body is expanded, simply relax and let the exhalation begin. At the end of the exhalation, when your body is contracted, simply relax and let the inhalation begin. Let each breath flow into the next breath by relaxing. Your breath will be flowing through the nose and diaphragmatic. It will be deep, smooth, even, and without pause. Your breath will be very deeply relaxed.

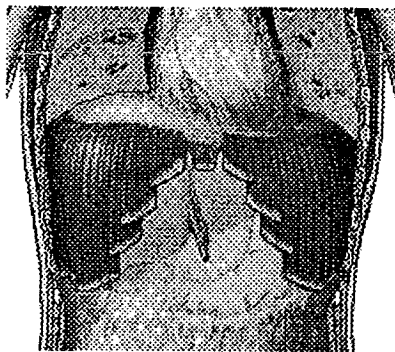
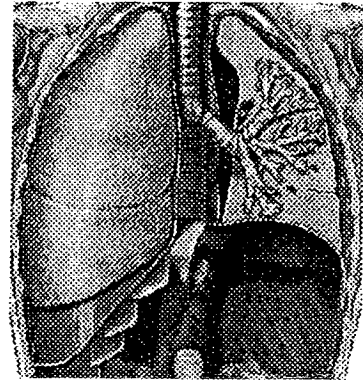
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# THE ANATOMY OF BREATHING



Either the mouth or nose can be used for breathing, but breathing out and in through the nose is the best choice whenever possible. The nose conditions the air entering the body. It filters coarse particles in the air; traps tiny impurities in its mucus lining; moistens and warms incoming air; swirls the incoming air to increase smell and protect the body from impurities; improves the sense of taste; brings air in contact with large surfaces of nasal lining; and reduces the speed, and improves the efficiency of breathing.

The lungs are spongy and lie, along with the heart, in the chest. Since blood is constantly flowing through the lungs, they are not the airy sacks we sometimes imagine them to be. They also have no muscle in them to move the air in and out. Instead, they must be stretched by muscles to increase their size and move incoming air through the nostrils. In the lung, carbon dioxide is exchanged for oxygen.



The diaphragm is the main muscle of breathing. It divides your torso into two separate parts, the chest and the abdomen. The diaphragm lies *below* the lungs, not around them. When it contracts, it pulls the lungs down, expanding them from the bottom, downward and outward. During the process of contraction the diaphragm presses on the organs below, squeezing them so that they press outward, especially in the area of the upper abdomen. When the diaphragm relaxes it is both pushed upward by the organs as they seek to regain their place, and pulled upward by forces within the lungs and

chest. Inhalation is active, and exhalation is relatively passive.

In yoga, breath is described as the essential, life-giving flywheel of the nervous system. The breath turns round and round, out and in, maintaining the balance of cleansing and nourishing necessary to sustain our lives and stabilize our emotions and nerves. This flow of breath is an important focus in meditation.

