

EMPIRE HEALTH AND WELLNESS

# THE FUNCTIONAL GUIDE TO BETTER BREATHING



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DR. SHANNON CONNOLLY

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# THE POWER OF BREATH

## TAKING THE FIRST STEP

### *Welcome!*

Before we get into all the amazing information I want to share about functional breathing, I first want to thank you for opening up to new ways of improving your health. Self-care is an essential tool for wellbeing and you have made the first step!

Many people struggle with their health because standard treatments or protocols lead to little-to-no success.

I practice with the philosophy that one technique or protocol does not work for everyone, and that the root of the problem is not always what it appears to be. I live to work side by side with my patients as a guide and dedicated partner to figure out the root cause of your symptoms.

This all starts with YOUR story...a story that usually begins with your very first breath into this world. Most of our physical aches and pains have three possible root causes:

- 1. A structural problem (muscle, bone, or ligament)**
- 2. A physiological problem (organ/blood, biochemistry)**
- 3. A limbic system problem (emotional, thoughts/feelings, attitudes)**

All these systems are interconnected; one cannot exist without the other. There is, however, one common denominator that ties all three together: *our breath*.

### **OUR BREATH CONTROLS EVERYTHING!**

Our bodies are constantly using oxygen to perform the necessary processes we need to live. From digestion to heart rate to the brain's messaging system, our breath gives our most basic cells the ability to perform. Learning how to hone in and control the breath is the key to taking control of your health.

Sadly, nearly *every patient* I work with is a stressed-out, inefficient breather!

I believe this is partly due to our modern lives of endless technology, instant gratification, and less and less human social contact. We have innately lost the ability to be self-aware and comfortable in our own skin. (Including myself!)

The good news is that we can take back control of our breath - and our health - and make radical changes with some easy steps and habits.

### *Let's dive in!*

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*Disclaimer:* There are many types of breathing exercises out there that use the breath in different ways (such as with yoga, pilates, meditation, and other practices). The particular breathing style recommended in this book is called "functional breathing" and is based on the natural style of breathing we are born using. Working with this type of breath makes our breathing more efficient, improves mobility, and enhances our stability. If you have questions about breathing exercises and your specific health concerns, please contact Dr. Shannon Connolly or your health care provider.



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# MEET YOUR EXPERT

**DR. SHANNON CONNOLLY, DC**  
**EMPIRE HEALTH & WELLNESS**



I'm Dr. Shannon Connolly, chiropractor and owner of Empire Health and Wellness in New York.

I am passionate about all things wellness! My experience as a two-sport high school athlete and Division 1 collegiate athlete taught me to strive for the best and live life with a "learn it all and practice" mindset.

I am determined to help educate the masses on how intricately the body functions. From movement-based therapy to functional nutrition, I am constantly learning to provide my patients with the best care possible.

## MY OWN TRANSFORMATION

After experiencing the amazing results of simply tuning into my breath, I now practice this type of breathing as a part of my everyday routine. It's a simple addition (5-10 minutes a day) that has made a massive change in my wellbeing. I now sleep better, have less anxiety, am no longer tight and stiff, and am generally more at ease in my body.

It has been a challenging process to make into a habit (with a lot of discipline and self-awareness), but the end result makes it all worth it. Consistency is key here, but I find the things that are hardest in life are the ones that we really should spend more time doing!

## MY GOAL FOR YOU

I wrote this ebook to help you and others find strength in the one simple yet crucial thing we can each control: *breathing*. I hope this ebook reflects just how imperative this process is to each one of us.

My goal is that you take away at least one or two bits of information that improves an area of your life. I hope you are eager to share this book and your findings with your loved ones so they, too, can benefit from functional breathing. I also hope that this book empowers you and uplifts you to take control of your own health.

At the end of the day, we all need more *connection*: connection between our brain and body, connection between our breath and organ systems, and connection between each other. In connecting more with your breath, you and your practitioner will be able to guide you to less pain and better overall health.

I hope this guide leads you to better breathing, new avenues for healing, and a more rewarding relationship with your body.



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# THE BASICS OF BREATHING

## A FOUNDATION FOR HEALTH

How often do you think about your breath? The rhythm, whether you hold your breath or not, or even the fact that you're breathing at all?

Most people don't think about their breathing, simply because our brains make it so easy and mindless. You may, however, find yourself thinking about these questions:

- ***Why am I constantly sore and/or in pain?***
- ***Why am I stiff?***
- ***Why do I have constant sinus issues?***
- ***Why am I anxious?***
- ***Why do I feel fatigued?***

Believe it or not, poor breathing is behind many of these issues and more. Let's dive in with the basics.

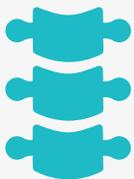
## WHY WE BREATHE



**Gas Exchange**  
Provides our cells, muscles, organs, brain, etc. with oxygen to function



**Regulates the Body**  
Maintains blood pressure and boosts metabolism



**Stability**  
Controls our body posture and stabilizes the spine



**Olfactory**  
Gives us our sense of smell



**Protection**  
Blocks dust and microbes with mucus production, cilia, and coughing.



**Sound Production**  
Helps us speak, sing, and make other sounds



**Immunity**  
Improves the immune system function



**Soothes**  
Calms the nervous system and relieves stress

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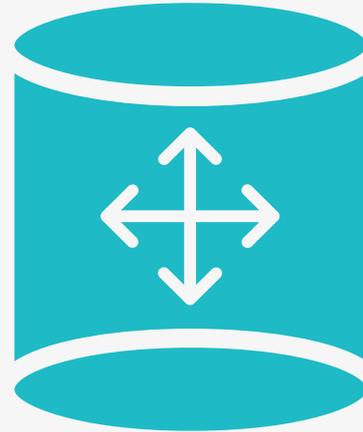
# THE SCIENCE OF BREATHING

## HOW BREATHING WORKS

The breath works much like a vacuum in a container.

Imagine your container as a cylinder where the top is the diaphragm and the bottom is the pelvic floor. The sides are made from all the surrounding muscles: the muscles of the spine, abdomen, obliques, and more.

When the muscles of the container activate, the inside pressure increases. In the body, this is called ***intra-abdominal pressure*** and is the core basis for stability and movement.

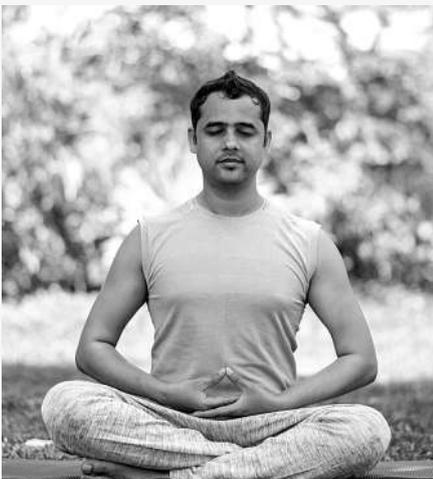


## YOUR FIRST BREATH

Believe it or not, you were born breathing with the diaphragmatic breath. In fact, you continued to grow through your first month of life by learning to breathe in this particular fashion. As you learned to breathe more easily, you could then progress this breathing into trunk stability and finally to movement.

Like learning to walk, we all learned how to breathe, stabilize, and move efficiently - with successes and failures along the way! Even if it doesn't quite feel natural to you yet, your body thrives on the natural stability and mobility that natural diaphragmatic breathing provides.

## CORE HEALTH: RELEARNING THE BASICS



Using the diaphragmatic breath can help you overcome a wide range of health issues. The first step is to relearn the basics, starting from the ***core***.

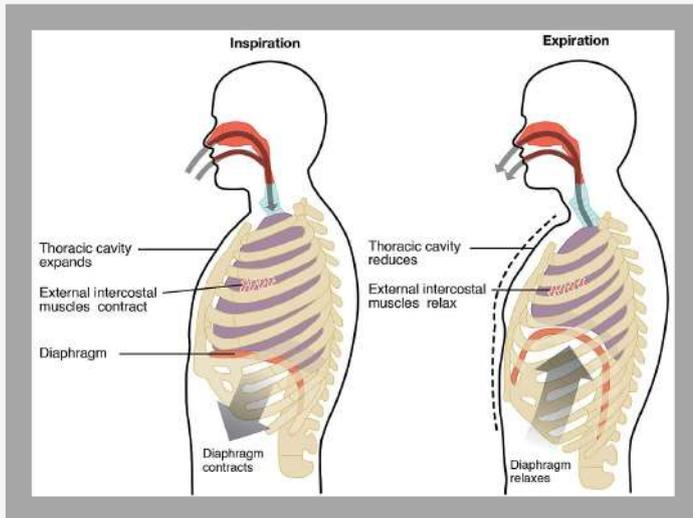
The core is our powerhouse. This is the center of our stability, and therefore all movement. Unfortunately, strengthening our core takes more than simply doing a bunch of crunches or sit ups. We have to re-learn how to use this entire system as one unit.

The best - and easiest - place to start is with your breath!

We will later learn how to practice the diaphragmatic breath and how to incorporate it into everyday life.

# THE SCIENCE OF BREATHING

## USING THE DIAPHRAGM



The diaphragm is our primary muscle of respiration. This umbrella-shaped muscle attaches to the inner surface of the lower ribs in the front and the lumbar spine vertebra in the back.

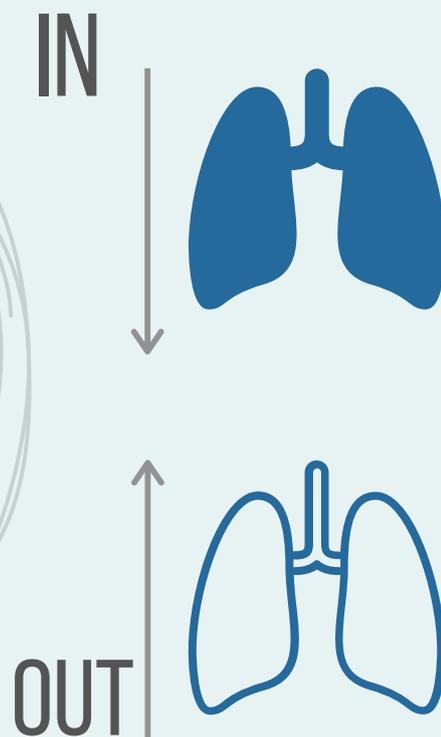
When we inhale, the diaphragm contracts and moves downward. This allows the lungs to expand and take in oxygen. As we exhale, the diaphragm relaxes and moves upward.

When you inhale, do you breathe vertically? Or horizontally?

**A healthy diaphragmatic breath should have more of a horizontal movement with the “core” muscles pushing outward as you exhale.**

## Try it!

Breathe in, sending the breath downward, below the ribs into the trunk, 360 degrees. Breathe out in a controlled, slow fashion by gently relaxing your trunk as you exhale. Try again, inhaling for 3 seconds, then exhaling for 6.



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# BREATHING TROUBLES

THE LINK BETWEEN INEFFECTIVE BREATHING & POOR HEALTH



Each day, you breathe an average of **30,000-50,000 breaths!**

If you are an inefficient breather, you may even be reaching higher numbers. This becomes repetitive and over time, your body will protect itself by creating compensation patterns. Eventually, you will feel the negative effects of this “compensation” in one way or another.

The most common results of poor breathing and compensation patterns are **aches, pains, and tightness**. The body loses its innate reflex and ability to efficiently stabilize through our trunk, leading to poor posture, muscle weakness, and pain.

While there are many causes and reasons we experience pain, my medical experience has shown me just how important the breath is in overcoming painful conditions.

I BELIEVE THE  
BREATH AND THE BODY'S  
ABILITY TO STABILIZE  
(EFFICIENTLY OR NOT)  
SHOULD BE HIGH ON THE  
LIST OF THINGS TO  
*evaluate first.*

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# BREATHING TROUBLES

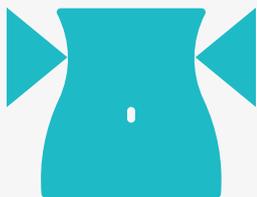
## WHY WE ARE INEFFECTIVE BREATHERS

Obviously we can see how our breath has a profound effect on our movement and health. There are many potential reasons why we are poor breathers, but here are some of the most common reasons:



### MONKEY SEE, MONKEY DO

Few people actually breathe well, so we learn poor habits from an early age. Shallow breathing is learned as we start imitating those around us as infants. This later becomes part of a pattern of postural and movement habits we have to unlearn to regain our health.



### SUCKING IT IN

Whether due to societal pressures or low self-confidence, most of us feel uncomfortable sticking our gut out. Sucking in our gut is probably the most popular habit we develop - and quite possibly the most damaging postural habit in the world. It also prevents high-quality diaphragmatic breathing.



### SEDENTARY LIFESTYLES

Our modern culture has led to a static life lived in mostly in chairs. We work at desks, drive everywhere, travel (sit on planes, trains), and unwind in front of the TV. In fact, we don't even have to move from our position to answer the phone or socialize! In a seated position, the hips are flexed to 90° and the lower back becomes the base of our trunk instead of the pelvic floor. This makes diaphragmatic breathing mechanically difficult and we resort to inefficient breathing habits.



### STRESS AND EMOTIONS

Chronic stress leads to a habit of shallow, inefficient breathing. Furthermore, breathing can be emotionally stimulating and expressive and can even help us to relieve pent up emotions or trauma. Sadly, many people miss out on the healing potential of diaphragmatic breath in order to avoid the discomfort of looking inward at themselves. Not only does this prevent deeper healing, it also encourages poor breathing styles.

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# THE DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATH

## HOW TO PRACTICE THE DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATH

Relearning your body's natural breath takes only a few minutes and a little practice. We will start slowly with only 1-2 minutes in the morning and evening, then build up to longer practice sessions as your body adjusts to these positive changes.

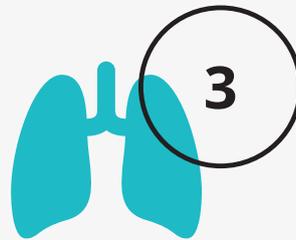
## EASY STEPS TO BETTER BREATHING

1.



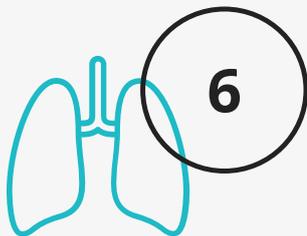
Lie on your back or sit tall in a chair. Bend your knees (you may place a pillow under them) and keep your head supported. Place one hand on your upper chest and one on your belly. You may alternatively bring your hands to the sides of your ribs or to the lower back.

2.



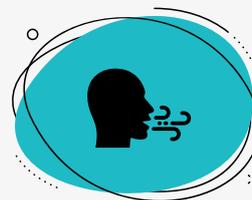
Slowly breathe in through your nose for a count of 3. You should feel the hand on your belly rise while the hand on your chest remains still. This may take a few breaths to get used to, just keep focusing your breath into your abdomen.

3.



Exhale slowly for a count of 6 as your stomach gently tightens and your hand lowers. Repeat the breath for 1-2 minutes or as long as you feel comfortable.

4.



Pay attention to what you feel during your session. You may notice that you resist your belly rising or that one side of your ribcage expands more than the other. Take note and see how you progress over time.

## WHEN TO PRACTICE THE DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATH

I recommend practicing the diaphragmatic breath at least twice a day:  
in the **morning** to stimulate the body and awaken the brain and  
in the **evening** to induce relaxation and calm the mind.

5-10 minutes of diaphragmatic breathing should also be used as a “warm up” and “cool down” for any **exercise or movement practice**. This ensures the diaphragm, TVA muscles, and abdominals are ready for movement and restored after exercise.

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# THE DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATH

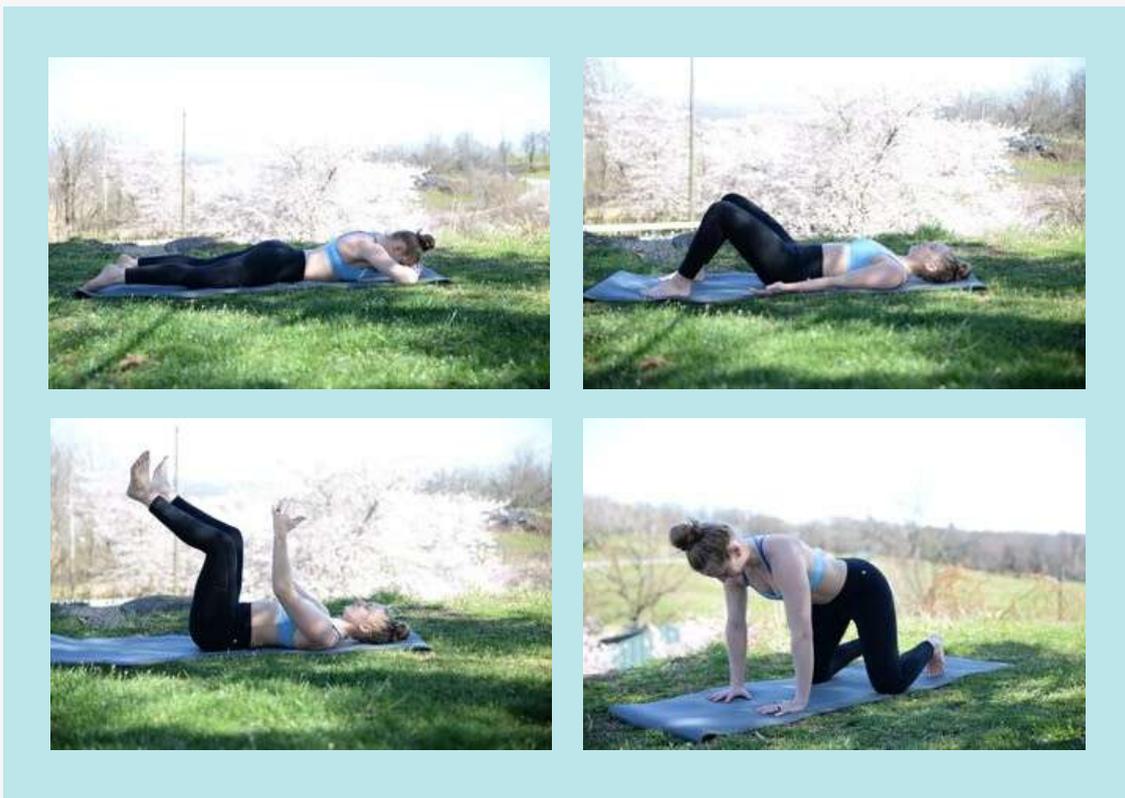
## TIPS FOR EVEN BETTER BREATHING

### USE YOUR NOSE

You will be breathing both in and out through your nose. You may find it easier to breathe in through your nose and out through the mouth to start. After a few sessions, transition to breathing in and out through the nose only as receptors in the nose help the brain activate the diaphragm.

### CHANGE IT UP

Try completing your breathing exercises in various positions to balance and challenge your diaphragm and activate different muscles groups. Try prone, supine, side-lying, quadruped, tripod (modification: supine 90 - chair/ball, half kneeling).



### POSTURE PERFECT

To make the most out of these breathing techniques, keep your neck long, the chin slightly tucked, chest wide, ribs down, and pelvis even (never push back into ground to flatten back or hyperextend the spine). To find your neutral position, tilt the pelvis back and forth a couple of times. Wherever you end up in the middle is your neutral spine.

### STAY POSITIVE

Don't worry if this relearning process feels challenging or takes longer than you expected. Many people have extreme difficulty trying to even find their diaphragm since it has been sucked in or under-used for so long! What would happen if you decided to turn on your old computer from 10 years ago that has been sitting away collecting dust? You may have to wait to charge it or replace a part or two, but eventually it will TURN ON! The same is true of your diaphragm and that is our goal in starting these breathing exercises.

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# NASAL BREATHING

## ENHANCING THE DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATH

### WHAT IS NASAL BREATHING?

It is simply breathing **in and out** through the nose. This can feel like a more challenging way of breathing, after regular practice, it will feel more natural.



NASAL BREATHING  
IS THE BEST WAY TO  
PRACTICE BREATHING.  
IT IS THE WAY THE  
HUMAN BODY WAS  
*designed to  
breathe.*

### WHY NASAL BREATHING IS CRUCIAL FOR HEALTH

According to experts, most people are breathing at only **10-20%** of their full lung capacity. These chronic, inefficient breathing patterns can greatly decrease our respiratory function over time, which in turn decreases our overall energy and wellbeing.

Breathing is necessary for life. Our bodies need the oxygen in air to perform their many functions. The exhalation phase of the breath is also key for health - it is the primary way our bodies expel toxins and waste throughout the day.

When we fail to use our full breathing potential, we can become vulnerable to a multitude of health problems, from high blood pressure to insomnia. Poor breathing can even lead to systemic oxygen deprivation, a problem that can pave the way for cancer.

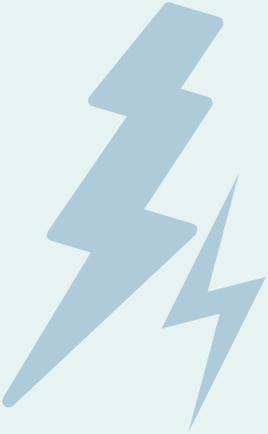
In 1931, researcher Otto Warburg won a Nobel Prize for showing how oxygen-starved cells mutate and become cancerous. If feeling more energized and pain-free isn't enough to encourage better breathing, Warburg's warnings should do the trick!

But breathing better isn't always a simple fix. Let's understand the obstacles to nasal breathing and how we can prevent them.

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# NASAL BREATHING

## CHALLENGES & SIMPLE SOLUTIONS



### **The Problem: Stress and Anxiety**

Many of us are consistently stressed out, overworked, and overstimulated. Living this way sadly leaves us in a chronic state of “fight or flight” and our breathing tends to be shallow and inefficient. Anxiety can make this problem even worse by causing short and rapid breaths that provide little oxygen for the body and increase the heart rate, making anxiety symptoms even worse!

**Solution:** Not only does nasal breathing help us take fuller, deeper breaths, it also stimulates the largest (and lowest) part of the lung to distribute greater amounts of oxygen throughout the body. Breathing through the nose forces us to slow down the breath. This calms the nervous system and eases emotions like anxiety and stress.

### **The Problem: Chronic Sinus Issues**

One reason people do not utilize the nose for optimal breathing is that they are chronically congested. Ongoing and stubborn sinus issues like congestion, infections, headaches, allergies, and environmental toxins are the cause of this blockage in our airways. Because of this, we tend to use mouth breathing to compensate for our lack of oxygen. While that helps us breathe in the moment, mouth breathing is not the breathing system and leads to more problems over time.

**Solution:** Nasal breathing increases the amount of oxygen we receive through each breath while also clearing the sinuses with the flow of fresh air. It regularly cleans out the free radicals left by the pollutants, toxins, and allergens in our environment. I recommend regular nasal irrigation with a neti pot and aromatherpy with essential oils such as eucalyptus, peppermint, lemon, and cardamon around the nasal cavity. One of the best ways to use essential oils for breathing is to diffuse these aromatic oils and inhale the smell. Essential oils can also be used topically. but be sure to invest in a quality oil (with approved CPTG Testing) that is safe for topical use or ingestion.



### **Problem: Insomnia**

Irregular sleep patterns and insomnia can negatively affect the body in many ways, as all of our organ systems need quality rest to function well. Without enough sleep, we can experience a host of health issues including poor memory, emotional stress, and poor immunity.

**Solution:** The nose houses olfactory bulbs, which are direct extensions of part of the brain called the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus is responsible for many functions in our bodies, particularly those that are automatic. It is the area of the brain that regulates heartbeat, blood pressure, thirst, appetite and, importantly, sleep cycles and brain health. Nasal breathing exercises can instantly reduce stress and lull our nervous systems into a peaceful, restful sleep.

A black and white photograph of a woman with long hair, sitting in a meditative pose. Her hands are clasped together in front of her chest, and her eyes are closed. She is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved top and dark shorts. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# THE DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATH

## BRINGING THE BREATH TO EVERYDAY LIFE

To experience life changing results from diaphragm breathing, the practice must become a habit of everyday life. Here are some guidelines to get started:

### **Keep it simple.**

We often think we have to jump in with full force to experience the benefits of something. In fact, what is more important is that you practice this technique regularly, even if for only a few minutes a day. This approach is much more effective and attainable in the long run.

### **Start the habit today.**

You can begin your daily diaphragmatic breathing habit today - even right now! A simple and quick 1-2 minutes is all you need to start. Now, try doing the breathing exercise above just once a day for a week. Many people find that this small practice, when done regularly, makes a big difference in how they feel. Soon, you will notice when your body needs a breathing break and it will become a natural and enjoyable part of your day.

### **Enhance your focus.**

It can be challenging to relax when your mind is full. Try focusing on one of these while you breathe to deepen your concentration:

- Listen to your heart's soothing beat as you breathe in and out.
- Picture a mental image you find relaxing, such as ocean waves or a peaceful forest.
- Imagine the sounds, colors and scents that bring you serenity.

### **Create a routine.**

The key to success is making this practice a part of your life for the long term as an integrated part of your day. Whether it's in the morning or at night, find a part of your day where you know you can always have time to practice. Set an alarm as a reminder or pair your breathing exercises with a habit you already have, like after brushing your teeth or while waiting for your morning coffee to brew.

### **Get a breathing buddy.**

New habits are more fun to form when you have an accountability partner. Choose a friend or partner who also wants to experience the benefits of healthy breathing and practice either together or solo. Keep in touch about your daily goals and encourage each other to stick with your new habit.

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# THE POWER OF BREATH

## FINAL THOUGHTS ON BREATHING FOR HEALTH

As John Douillard, author of *Body Mind Sport*, says:

*"To experience the zone in training is our birthright, and it is within the design of our human nervous system to access it.*

*To push ourselves to exhaustion when we have the capacity to allow effortless, perfect performance to flow naturally, from the inside out, seems somehow primitive and a waste of time.*

*I have never heard of a peak experience that was described as painful, grueling or exhausting. Rather, the descriptions always fit the original definition of exercise: rejuvenating, stress-relieving and accessing full human potential."*

I believe that we all have access to our greatest health potential and the opportunity to live "in the zone" of life when we make good use of our breath. The breath allows us to make the most of every moment, feel the flow of life, and connect our brain and bodies.

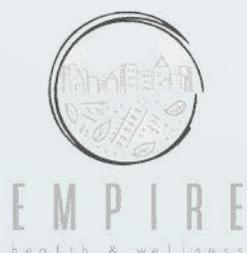
### BETTER BREATHING & BETTER HEALTH AHEAD

I hope that you found a better understanding of the power of breath and a renewed motivation for healthy living in the pages of this book. My mission is to help others be more connected to their breath and feel empowered in using this constant source of restoration.

As you move forward in your new habit of daily diaphragmatic breathing, be sure to let me know if you have any questions along the way. Feel free to share how this simple practice changes your life and health with me!

Best wishes,  
Dr. Shannon

*We all deserve*  
**TO FEEL AND BENEFIT  
FROM THE  
POWER OF THE  
BREATH.**



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