



CHRISTIE CLINIC

Medicine for Your Life

Pulmonary Function Lab

101 West University Avenue, 4th Floor
Champaign, Illinois 61820
217.366.8827



Natural Breathing Exercises

Breathing In, Breathing Out

A powerful, traditional practice for self transformation

Belly Breathing

A fundamental Authentic Breathing® practice

Straw Breathing

A safe, powerful exercise for the diaphragm

The Tan Tien Cleansing Breath

A safe, effective practice for health and healing

A Breathing Meditation

A simple meditation that you can do daily

Breathing In and Out

One of the simplest, safest, and most powerful breathing practices you can undertake on your own behalf is to consciously follow your breathing in the many circumstances of your life. As you inhale, be aware that you are inhaling. As you exhale, be aware that you are exhaling. Try this practice for 10 minutes at a time at least three times a day. It will help free you from your automatic thoughts and emotional

reactions and thus enable you to wake up in your daily life more often, to live with more receptivity and clarity in the present moment. You may find this practice especially useful at moments when you are anxious or angry. With roots in Buddhism and the other great spiritual traditions, this is a wonderful practice for both beginners and advanced practitioners.

Belly Breathing

Introduction

Our belly is one of the major areas that get tight and tense when we are under a lot of stress. And this greatly affects our internal organs, our breath, our energy, and our overall health. In this breathing exercise, we are going to work with “belly breathing” in order to open our belly and allow our diaphragm to move deeper down into our abdomen on inhalation and farther up to squeeze our lungs and support our heart on exhalation. This will have a powerful influence on our respiration and on the way we breathe in the many conditions of our lives.

Practice

Lie down comfortably on your back on a bed, mat, or carpeted floor. Position yourself with your feet flat on the floor and your knees bent (pointing upward). Simply follow your breathing for a minute or two with your attention. See if you can sense which parts of your body your breath touches.

Continue to follow your breathing as you rub your hands together until they are very warm. Put your hands (one on top of the other) on your belly, with the center of your lower hand touching your navel. Watch how your breathing responds.

You may notice that your belly wants to expand as you inhale and retract as you exhale. Let this happen, but don't try to force it.

If your belly seems tight, rub your hands together again until they are warm and then massage your belly, especially right around the outside edge of your belly button. Notice how your belly begins to soften and relax.

Now rub your hands together again until they are warm and put them on your belly again. Watch how this influences your breath. Do not try to do anything. Simply watch and enjoy as your belly begins to come to life, expanding as you inhale and retracting as you exhale.

If your belly still seems overly tight and does not want to move as you breathe, press down with your hands on your belly as you exhale. Then as you inhale, gradually release the tension. Try this several times. Notice how your belly begins to open more on inhalation.

When you are ready to stop, be sure to sense your entire abdominal area, noting any special sensations of warmth, comfort, and energy. Spend a few minutes allowing these sensations to spread into all the cells of your belly and all the way back to your spine.

This simple practice will have a highly beneficial effect on your breathing, especially if you do it on a regular basis. Remember that you can try this practice any time, day or night. Though it's easiest if you are lying down, you can also do it sitting, standing, walking, and so on. It is an excellent practice to try before you get out of bed in the morning. It is also an excellent practice to work with whenever you are anxious or tense, because it will help relax you and center your energy. Over time, it will help slow down your breathing and make it more natural.

Straw Breathing

Introduction

The straw-breathing exercise, which is used in one form or another by a number of breath therapists and teachers, can have a powerful and beneficial influence on your diaphragm and your breath. The exercise can help condition your diaphragm to relax and contract harmoniously and move slowly and evenly through its entire range of motion. It can also help empty your lungs more completely on exhalation, and allow for a larger, more spontaneous inhalation. In addition, it can have a beneficial influence on all muscles related to breathing.

Practice

Use an old-fashioned straw with a relatively small diameter, not one of the new ones with huge diameters designed for fast consumption. Pick up the straw and hold it very lightly in your fingers. Inhale naturally through your nose. Be sure not to force your inhalation in any way. When you're ready to exhale (it's important not to hold your breath at the end of the inhalation), place one end of the straw between your lips and make sure your face and the straw are pointed straight ahead. Use your fingers to ensure that the straw does not dangle toward the ground. Your lips and face should be very relaxed. As you exhale, let the exhalation take place naturally and gently only through the straw. We suggest that you pinch your nose closed with the fingers of your other hand to be sure there's no air to be exhaled through your nose. Do not use force as you exhale. Just exhale in a relaxed, natural way, being sure that the air leaves only through the straw.

When your exhalation is almost complete (80-90 percent), take the straw out of your mouth; close your mouth; finish your exhalation in a natural, relaxed way through your nose, and then simply wait for the inhalation to occur on its own. After using the straw for one exhalation, just breath normally without the straw for two or three breaths through your nose, letting your breath settle by itself into a natural rhythm. Then, inhale through your nose again; return the straw to your mouth, and repeat the entire process.

You can work in this way four or five minutes at a time on the first day, and then add a minute or two each day until you can breathe in this way for 10 minutes or more at a time without any discomfort. You can do the exercise several times throughout the day. During or after each session, you may find yourself stretching, yawning, and so on. This is quite normal, especially at the beginning. If at any time during the exercise you find yourself short of breath, hyperventilating, or having any other experience that does not feel quite right, simply stop and let your breathing normalize for several natural breaths before continuing.

If you work with this exercise on a regular basis, you will soon observe your breathing becoming spontaneously fuller, slower, and freer. Some people have noticed dramatic changes in just one or two sessions. Of course, to fully re-educate your diaphragm and your overall breathing coordination will take continued and varied work over a period of weeks, months, and even years.

The Tan Tien Cleansing Breath

Introduction

The tan tien cleansing breath is a powerful, natural breathing exercise for both health preservation and self-healing, as well as for increasing your inner, vital energy. Based on natural, diaphragmatic breathing, it involves inhaling through the nose and directing the breath energy down into the lower tan tien, the area just beneath the navel, and exhaling waste products up and out through the nose or mouth while simultaneously condensing the breath energy into the cells of the lower abdomen. The tan tien cleansing breath requires a long, slow exhalation. By intentionally prolonging the exhalation, you not only promote the removal of toxins from your body, but you also help turn on your parasympathetic nervous system, thus furthering deep relaxation and healing.

Practice

The key to using tan tien breathing to help heal yourself is to inhale gently all the way down into the tan tien area, an inch or two below your navel. As you inhale, put your attention on the lower tan tien and sense your breath energy filling your lower abdomen. Feel how your abdomen naturally expands. If you like, you can put your hands on your belly (see the Belly Breathing Exercise) to help attract your breath there. As you exhale, sense any tensions and toxins going out with the breath as your abdomen naturally contracts, but do not “throw out the baby with the bath water.” Learn to be attentive to the vital warmth or vibration of the breath energy remaining in your abdomen as you exhale. Guard it with your awareness. Feel it being absorbed deep into your cells as you exhale waste products upward and out through your nose or mouth. Do not use any force or effort in doing this practice. Use only your awareness and intention.

Tan tien breathing is an important aspect of natural, authentic breathing, so be patient and gentle as you undertake this exercise. The key is to work with your full attention, without any feeling of willfulness, and to sense the energy in your abdomen as you breathe naturally and effortlessly. If you can work in this way for several minutes each day for a few weeks, the tan tien cleansing breath will quickly become a regular and natural part of your life.



Natural Breathing Exercises

A Breathing Meditation

The process of breathing, of respiration, of the fundamental movement of inspiration and expiration, is one of the great miracles of existence. Breathing not only unleashes the energy of life, but it also provides a healing pathway into the deepest recesses of our being. To inhale fully is to fill ourselves with the energies of life, to be inspired; to exhale fully is to empty ourselves, to open ourselves to the unknown, to be expired. It is through a deepening awareness of the ever-changing rhythms of the primal process of breathing that we begin to awaken our inner healing powers—the energy of wholeness.

Breathing Awareness— An Integral Part of Meditation

For thousands of years, breathing awareness has been an integral part of meditation, an integral part of the journey toward our own essence. Our breathing, especially when it is soft and full, can attract our awareness deep inside the extraordinary temple of our body, where it can help awaken our inner dimensions of spaciousness and silence. The energy of breathing, when it is experienced in the full light of our interior consciousness, can help animate and harmonize our being at every level.

The following breathing meditation is the first of a very simple series of breathing practices. Do not, however, underestimate its power. If you can work with this breathing meditation

every morning for a minimum of 15 minutes over a period of several weeks, you will begin to experience its many beneficial effects both on your body and your psyche.

Begin the Meditation

Sit quietly for several minutes, either cross-legged on the floor or on a chair (without leaning against the back of the chair). Be sure that your spine is erect yet supple. Your hands should be folded gently together in your lap or palms down on your knees. As you sit, sense your weight being supported by the earth and allow the whole sensation of your body to enter your awareness and come to life.

Now, simply follow your breathing as you inhale and exhale. It is through following our breathing through our sensation that we begin to open to the power of breath. During inhalation, sense the temperature and vibration of the air as it flows from the tip of your nose through your nasal passages, throat, and trachea on its way into your lungs. During exhalation, sense the air going up and out of your lungs through your trachea, throat, and nose. (Do not manipulate your breathing in any way during this practice.)

After at least five minutes, rub your hands together several times, put them over your navel, and sense

your belly. How does your breathing respond to the warmth and energy from your hands? As you continue to follow your breathing, can you sense your belly expanding as you inhale and flattening as you exhale, without losing your awareness of the air as it enters and leaves your lungs?

As you begin to observe more clearly these movements of your breathing, you may start to experience a sense of energy deep in your belly, at the level about an inch or two below your navel. During inhalation, you may feel this energy filling your entire belly. During exhalation, you may feel the energy becoming more compact and concentrated. Really let yourself experience (and enjoy) this expanding and contracting sense of energy in your belly as your breathing continues.

Continue working this way for another five minutes or more. When you're almost ready to stop, give yourself a couple of minutes to sense the energy, or at least some of the energy, being absorbed into the cells of your belly and back toward your spine. Then bring your attention back to the whole sensation of yourself just sitting there, breathing. Watch, sense, and feel everything that's taking place, including your breathing, until you are ready to stop.

See if you can sense yourself as a breathing being.

