



CHRISTIE CLINIC

Medicine for Your Life

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Breathing Exercises for Running

There has not been much emphasis on the correct breathing exercises for running efficiently. This is largely because breathing should be relaxed and natural and will be unique for every runner. But there are many breathing exercises that you can do to not only improve your running efficiency but also your overall mental and physical health.

Often times in running our breathing becomes labored and stressed, and this can bring on cramps, poor performance, and premature fatigue. The best time to do your breathing exercises for running would be at the start of your workout as you warm up for the running itself. My high school coach used to say that running was 99% mental, to which we would all scoff as we rubbed our sore legs. But he was right! Think about how our thoughts can affect our

heart rate and our ability to perform. How effective are you at work if you're worrying about something at home? Have you ever been in a situation where your heart would race and your palms would sweat without even moving a muscle? Running can be a great way to reduce our overall mental stress, but we need to approach the exercise in a relaxed state...and that's where the breathing comes in.

Our thoughts and mental state have

a large impact on our physical ability. Rapid and shallow breathing can cause running cramps and an overall state of panic. Running can be a great stress reducer, and it can also help us pull in some good clean oxygenated air to revive our bodies.

Breathing Exercises for Running

Here are some breathing exercises for running, along with some patterns and tips to help you succeed:

The Deep Breath

Most of our day-to-day breathing involves only the upper two thirds of our lung capacity. It's only when we engage our diaphragm that we fill the lower part of our lungs. Taking a deep breath can help relax us, reduce stress, eliminate cramps, and increase our aerobic capacity. Breathing exercises can be done when not running, as well. Take a full breath in, filling up your entire lungs; hold for a count of 5, and slowly release it. If you're doing this breathing exercise while running, do not hold the breath. In fact, the relaxation breath (in the nose, out through the mouth) is hard to do when running. Personally, I use both my nose and mouth when running and try to pull in as much as I can get. The deep breath alone will help you get a bit more relaxed, and it'll give you a good shot of oxygen when you need it.

Breathing to Music

While the deep breath can and should be used for a pre-race calming or to settle down mid-race, one of the most effective breathing exercises for running is simply to adopt a cadence that works for you and your pace. In high school, I would usually find a song to mentally rehearse throughout the race, as this would keep my mind from wandering, and it would help my breathing stay regulated and productive. It could be a favorite fast-tempo song, or one with some encouraging lyrics (for example: "I feel good," etc...). If you don't think music has an effect on your breathing or pace, take note of the changes next time you run with your MP3 player! I've marveled at how a simple song like "Rocky" or "Chariots of Fire" can launch me into a much faster pace, subconsciously.

Cadence

For some of the more disciplined runners, try a cadence per inhale and exhale. Cadences can be described as steps per inhale, followed by steps per exhale. Most elite distance runners do a 2-2 (2 steps per inhale and 2 steps per exhale) in the beginning of the race and finish on a 2-1 cadence (2 steps per inhale and 1 step per exhale). If you find that you're getting cramps or light headed with a 2-2 cadence, try a 3-3 cadence or vary the foot that you're starting with. If that doesn't work, relax your pace to the point where your breathing is not labored.

Breathing exercises for running can benefit not only your racing times but your overall stress levels. Yoga, martial arts, meditation, and many other activities use breathing to focus our energies on the task at hand. See what some breathing exercises can do for you and your fitness goals.

