

TEN SECRETS FOR BETTER BREATHING:

Here are ten secrets for better breathing, which are also found in Free Your Breath, Free Your Life, by Dennis Lewis:

1. If possible in your daily life, inhale and exhale only through your nose, even when you are doing aerobic exercise.
2. Sense the movement of your breath frequently in the midst of your everyday activities. Remember not to hold your breath.
3. Be sure your belly stays relaxed. Let it expand as you inhale and retract as you exhale. Touch it and massage it frequently. Your belly is the foundation of your breath.
4. Breath is life and movement. Let your breath engage and fill every part of your body, especially your belly, back, spine, and chest.
5. To transform your breathing, start with your exhalation, with "letting go."
6. A long, slow exhalation helps harmonize your diaphragm and turns on your "relaxation response."
7. Sense the natural pause after exhalation; let yourself rest there for a moment.
8. Let your inhalation arise by itself, when it's ready.
9. Sense the various breathing spaces of your body several times a day. Smile into these spaces and observe how your awareness helps them open and close effortlessly.
10. Remember, you are a breathing being, alive right now and here. Let yourself feel the mystery and the miracle of your breath and your life as often as you can.

Deep Breathing Exercise:

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, simply be aware that you are inhaling. As you exhale, simply be aware that you are exhaling. Try this practice for 10 minutes or so 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.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Sit in a comfortable chair--reclining arm chairs are ideal. Bed is okay too. Get as comfortable as possible--no tight clothes, no shoes, don't cross your legs. Take a deep breath; let it out slowly. Again. What you'll be doing is alternately tensing and relaxing specific groups of muscles. After tension, a muscle will be more relaxed than prior to the tensing. Concentrate on the feel of the muscles, specifically the contrast between tension and relaxation. In time, you will recognize tension in any specific muscle and be able to reduce that tension.

Don't tense muscles other than the specific group at each step. Don't hold your breath, grit your teeth, or squint! Breathe slowly and evenly and think only about the tension-relaxation contrast. Each tensing is for 10 seconds; each relaxing is for 10 or 15 seconds. Count "1,000 2,000..." until you have a feel for the time span. Note that each step is really two steps--one cycle of tension-relaxation for each set of opposing muscles.

Do the entire sequence once a day if you can, until you feel you are able to control your muscle tensions. Be careful: If you have problems with pulled muscles, broken bones, or any medical contraindication for physical activities, consult your doctor first.

1. **Hands.** The fists are tensed; relaxed. The fingers are extended; relaxed.
2. **Biceps and triceps.** The biceps are tensed (make a muscle--but shake your hands to make sure not tensing them into a fist); relaxed (drop your arm to the chair--really drop them). The triceps are tensed (try to bend your arms the wrong way); relaxed (drop them).
3. **Shoulders.** Pull them back (careful with this one); relax them. Push the shoulders forward (hunch); relax.
4. **Neck (lateral).** With the shoulders straight and relaxed, the head is turned slowly to the right, as far as you can; relax. Turn to the left; relax.
5. **Neck (forward).** Dig your chin into your chest; relax. (bringing the head back is not recommended--you could break your neck).
6. **Mouth.** The mouth is opened as far as possible; relaxed. The lips are brought together or pursed as tightly as possible; relaxed.
7. **Tongue (extended and retracted).** With mouth open, extend the tongue as far as possible; relax (let it sit in the bottom of your mouth). Bring it back in your throat as far as possible; relax.
8. **Tongue (roof and floor).** Dig your tongue into the roof of your mouth; relax. Dig it into the bottom of your mouth; relax.
9. **Eyes.** Open them as wide as possible (frown your brow); relax. Close your eyes tightly (squint); relax. Make sure you completely relax the eyes, forehead, and nose after each of the tensings--this is actually a toughy.
10. **Breathing.** Take as deep a breath as possible--and then take a little more; let it out and breathe normally for 15 seconds. Let all the breath in your lungs out--and then a little more; inhale and breathe normally for 15 seconds.
11. **Back.** With shoulders resting on the back of the chair, push your body forward so that your back is arched; relax. Be very careful with this one, or don't do it at all.
12. **Butt.** Tense the butt tightly and raise pelvis slightly off chair; relax. Dig buttocks into chair; relax.
13. **Thighs.** Extend legs and raise them about 6" off the floor or the foot rest--but don't tense the stomach; relax. Dig your feet (heels) into the floor or foot rest; relax.
14. **Stomach.** Pull in the stomach as far as possible; relax completely. Push out the stomach or tense it as if you were preparing for a punch in the gut; relax.
15. **Calves and feet.** Point the toes (without raising the legs); relax. Point the feet up as far as possible (beware of cramps-if you get them or feel them coming on, shake them loose); relax.
16. **Toes.** With legs relaxed, dig your toes into the floor; relax. Bend the toes up as far as possible; relax.

Now just relax for a while. As your days of practice progress, you may wish to skip the steps that do not appear to be a problem for you. After you've become an expert on your tension areas (after a few weeks), you can concern yourself only with those. These exercises will not eliminate tension, but when it arises, you will know it immediately, and you will be able to "tense-relax" it away or even simply wish it away.