

## **BREATHING EXERCISES**

A 20% reduction in oxygen blood levels may be caused by the aging process and normal breathing habits. Poor breathing robs energy and negatively affects mental alertness. Unless breathing is exercised, aging affects the respiratory system as follows:

*Stiffness:* The rib cage and surrounding muscles get stiff causing inhalation to become more difficult. Less elasticity and weak muscles leave stale air in the tissues of the lungs and prevents fresh oxygen from reaching the blood stream.

*Rapid, Shallow Breathing:* This type of breathing, often caused by poor posture and weak or stiff muscles, leads to poor oxygen supply, respiratory disease, sluggishness, or heart disease.

The following exercises are simple ways to deepen breathing and to cleanse the lungs. These exercises will also increase energy and decrease tension.

### **BELLY BREATH EXERCISE**

Lie flat on your back to get a proper sense of deep breathing. (Have some small pillows available to reduce strain by tucking them under the neck and knees. The natural course of breathing in that position will create a slight rise in the stomach upon inhaling and a slight fall upon exhaling.)

Place your hands palm down on your stomach at the base of the rib cage. (The lungs go that far down. What fills them deeper is the pushing down of the diaphragm. The diaphragm creates a suction which draws air into the lungs. the air is then expelled when the diaphragm pushes up. In this process, the life-giving oxygen fills the lungs and gets into the blood stream for distribution to the cells. Carbon dioxide is expelled from the blood into the about-to-be exhaled breath, thus cleansing the body and blood of waste products.) Lay the palms of your hands on your stomach just below the rib cage, middle fingers barely touching each other, and take a slow deep breath. (As the diaphragm pushes down, the stomach will slightly expand causing the fingertips to separate somewhat.

This movement indicates full use of the lungs, resulting in a truly deep breath rather than the "puffed chest" breath experienced by many as the greatest lung capacity. Chest breathing fills the middle and upper parts of the lungs. Belly breathing is the most efficient method. Infants and small children use only this method until the chest matures. The yoga breath or roll breathing combines belly and chest breathing.

## **COMPLETE BREATH EXERCISE**

*Practice about 5 minutes.*

1. Sit up straight. Exhale.
2. Inhale and, at the same time, relax the belly muscles. Feel as though the belly is filling with air.
3. After filling the belly, keep inhaling. Fill up the middle of your chest. Feel your chest and rib cage expand.
4. Hold the breath in for a moment, then begin to exhale as slowly as possible.
5. As the air is slowly let out, relax your chest and rib cage. Begin to pull your belly in to force out the remaining breath.
6. Close your eyes, and concentrate on your breathing.
7. Relax your face and mind.
8. Let everything go.

## **HUMMING BREATH EXERCISE**

Follow the instructions for inhaling the COMPLETE BREATH (Steps 1-3 above). Now, as you begin to slowly exhale, make a HUM sound. Keep making that humming sound as long as possible. Pull your stomach muscles in, squeezing out a few more seconds of humming. Then relax. *Practice for 2 to 3 minutes.*

## **CHINESE BREATH EXERCISE**

A very fine, short (though not shallow) breath exercise comes from the Chinese Tai Chi Chuan. Three short inhales are done through the nose without exhaling. On the first inhale, the arms are lifted from the sides straight out in front at shoulder height. On the second, the arms are opened out straight to the sides while still at shoulder height. And on the third, the arms are lifted straight over the head. Then, on the exhale through the mouth, the arms are moved in an arc back down to the sides. Usually, ten or twelve breaths are sufficient and will not cause light headedness. If light headedness should occur, simply stop the exercise. This exercise also has the effect of really opening up people physically. In subtle ways, this exercise uses the body in leading the mind and spirit to greater openness with each other and the environment.

**CAUTION !!** Especially for older people: Never do panting or shallow breathing except while seated. Hyperventilation may occur. As long as one is seated, hyperventilation will not be a problem because, even if a brief blackout should occur, the body's automatic breathing apparatus will immediately take over.