

HEALTHY HOMEWORK™

BREATHING

"The human body was designed to walk, run or stop; it wasn't built for coasting." –Cullen Hightower.

As a clinic focused on a holistic approach to health, patient responsibility is the essential element in creating an optimal health plan. We have created healthy homework that offers tools to challenge you in making positive changes in your lifestyle and possibly accelerate your level of healing. We feel that true health is not just physical comfort, but a holistic union of well being on all levels. This is why we present your homework focus in 3 different perspectives-body, mind and spirit. We will explore 3 different ways of approaching one singular subject. In this case we will look at breathing and 3 different ways to reap its benefits and possibly deepen your experience and enjoyment of this form of practice. It is always important to remember that your healthcare is your own practice, so follow what feels best for you. This may mean pushing comfort zones at times and pulling back at others. Please experiment and enjoy this practice program on all levels... mind, body and spirit.



tenacy in which we breathe can be the determining factor in our level of wellbeing. With shallow breaths that do not surpass our chest, most of us intake only half the amount of oxygen we are capable of taking into each breath. When we learn that 70% of our energy comes from our breathing, it is worthwhile to become more conscious of how we take in oxygen.

It is not just purely oxygen that energizes us by giving life force to each cell, it is the many ways of how we breathe that support our body. The human body is designed to remove 70% of it's toxins through breathing while

only a small percentage is discarded through sweat, defecation and urination. Dr. Stephen Irvine, a renowned molecular biologist states: "Hypoxia, or lack of oxygen in tissues, is the fundamental cause for all degenerative disease." This can equate illness as the result of improper removal of toxins in the body.

This month's article Breathing.

Stop. Take a moment and just breathe. Deep full breathes. The wealth of life is in the power of your lungs. From the pure physicality of oxygen exchange to the entrancing silence that can be attained through it, breathing is without question the most vital element of life.

Body

"Breathing is the first place one should look to when fatigue, disease, or other evidence of disordered energy presents itself. Breathing is truly the body's most basic communication system."

–Sheldon Saul Hendler, MD, Ph.D.

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A simple breath can hold your level of health within it. We all know that breath is the one indicator that we are alive, but how alive are we? The depth and the consis-

An oxygenated body works better because it is stronger. With improved circulation, oxygen helps to nourish all your systems, which in the long term can produce denser bones, thicker cartilage and a greater blood volume.

This relates to disease prevention. Dr. Dean Ornish states that "Coronary heart disease is due to a lack of oxygen received by the heart." Many studies are now showing the link between lack of oxygen and cancer. What is being observed is that at the cellular level there is one prime cause of cancer: the replacement of normal cellular oxygen respiration by anaerobic (oxygen-deficient) cell respiration. Though fatigue and a yawn may be the primary indicator that there isn't enough oxygen in the body, what happens at the cellular level may be detrimental. This is amazing to consider since our oxygen intake is totally in our control.

HOMEWORK

There are many ancient-breathing techniques such as Qi Gong and Yogic breathing that encourages us to return to our original method of breathing - belly or diaphragmatic breathing. If you watch babies breathe you will notice they use their lungs right down to their bellies when they are breathing. Unfortunately many of us have learned to hold our breath back and breathe only from our chest. This limits us to a minimal amount of oxygen intake in comparison to what is available to us.

Your homework is to get to know your diaphragm! Your diaphragm is a domed sheet of muscle separating your lungs and abdomen. It expands down when our breath comes in and comes up when our breath goes out. Practice belly breathing any time, as much as possible.

It may take a real conscious effort at first, but with practice it will integrate into the way you automatically breathe. When you practice, make sure your stomach and spine are relaxed. Even though you are working on how you breathe, you do not want to breathe laboriously. Breathe in through your nose and let your belly expand and your diaphragm move down. As you breathe out, exhale completely. Bring your belly button towards your spine and feel your diaphragm lift as you let all the air out of your lungs. Release your abdomen and repeat, remembering to stay relaxed and allow the oxygen rich breath nourish and replenish your whole being.

Mind

How many times have you been in a stressful situation and someone has said "take a breath". There is a significant relationship between breathing and mental wellbeing. Breathing is a natural stress regulator that assists in taking in and releasing the high amount of stimulus our minds process. We often withhold expressing our emotions or thoughts out of fear or to "keep the peace". Without realizing it, this suppression often takes place in

withholding our breath as well. Shallow breaths only bring in a minimal amount of oxygen and do not allow for a significant enough exhale necessary to release any stress or emotions. This is very detrimental to our physical, mental and emotional health. If stress is not properly released or recognized, it will build until the individual breaks down mentally, physically... or both. Breathing properly is something we can do daily, moment to moment to allow ourselves to cope with daily stresses and to recognize how we are truly feeling. It can offer a sense of balance and strength when we are feeling a lack of control or in need of grounding within ourselves. Breathing deeply is the number one cure for anxiety.

If we consciously begin to slow down and relax with deep slow breaths, it will also create space in the mind.



Our brains use 20% of our body's energy and 20% of our air supply, yet the brain is only 2% of our body's weight. Oxygen rich blood is ideal for the brain to perform at optimal levels. Many of us feel sluggishness in a 'brain fog' throughout the day; this may be due to a lack of oxygen. Breathing brings clarity to the mind and mental focus. Instead of a nap or a stimulant, like coffee, deep breathing may

be the key to getting you through your long days.

HOMEWORK

Being aware of how you breathe can be very challenging to put into practice due to the automatic nature of the act itself. Your homework is to become conscious of how you are breathing during stressful and busy periods of your day. Attempt to use breath as your personal therapy for stress management. Observe yourself during your day... how do you breathe? If you feel that your breath is contained or shallow, attempt to integrate the belly breathing introduced in your body homework. Notice how it feels to make this change. You may feel resistance to breathing deeply, but instead of judging or

being hard on yourself, take it as information to why and when you hold the stress. As you apply this breathing technique you may be surprised how you truly feel about a situation. You may also be surprised by your ability to stay calm and sustain your energy over longer periods of time, no matter what level of demand there is of you. Try to practice this awareness during low energy times too, when motivation and concentration is at a low. Providing your system with high amounts of oxygen will renew your energy, increase focus and can introduce a whole new level of balance within yourself.

Spirit

Breathing is a sacred act. Moment by moment, it is an affirmation that we are indeed the bestowers of our own life. As breath is at the base level of survival, it is also the base level for most spiritual traditions and meditations. Buddhists believe that you are only allotted a certain amount of breaths in your life, so to breathe slowly is to have longevity. Breath is often the only focus during meditation in many traditions- watching the breath, moving the breath, being the breath. As it is the essence of life, it is often perceived as the essence of spirit. How we breathe often reflects how we live. So to connect with the nature of our breath is to connect with the nature of ourself and our life. This may give a different perspective on what has already been discussed about the resistance to breathe to our fullest capacity. Perhaps this is a reflection of how we have fear to live our fullest potential?!

Our breath and how we use it can be a major tool to attain a level of peace and wellbeing that we all crave. The breath can be used as a vehicle for healing ourselves emotionally, physically and spiritually. It is a tool of focus and can be used to isolate and relieve pain and stagnation. Many of us follow a routine of unspoken rules or systems in our lives that give us a feeling of security. This may also make us feel trapped. Focused breathing can be a safe and gentle way to introduce a sense of expansiveness and freedom from the boundaries we place on ourselves. This creates a very relaxing and peaceful experience. The simplicity of the act itself can bring us closer to our spirit. This often provides renewed perspective and can help us lighten up. After all, you need to breathe deeply to laugh out loud.

HOMEWORK

Create some quiet time in your day to simply just breathe. 5-10 minutes is a lot to start with and you will find the most benefit if you are able to practice daily. Perhaps just after you finish a meal, or when you are lying down before you fall asleep. Take this time to be with yourself and enjoy the power of life you have within your breath. Use the belly breathing exercise already discussed and be open to explore the feelings and sensations that come forward as you sit with yourself. Your mind may try to distract you with your to-do lists and worries of the day. Do not be hard on yourself, just be patient and resume your attention to your breathing. It is a place for you to focus so you can go beyond the confines of daily mind chatter. Monks will spend lifetimes to attain the focus and silence of the breath alone, so do not expect it from yourself right away.

As you consciously breathe, you can reflect on what your daily practice of breathing is. How have you used breath in your life? Is it with shallow sips of air? Is breathing laborious for you? Are you often out of breath? Is there a reluctance to breathing deeply, a tightness? You can explore what is restricting you from really drinking deeply from that well of life-giving oxygen? We encourage you to go at your own pace and enjoy the process of getting to know the most basic and important health mechanism you have - breathing.

Blow and you can extinguish a fire. Blow and you can make a fire. (Zen koan)

***“If you are faced with a challenge
Refuse to be panic stricken.
Life has not ended for you
Life flows on. Declare for yourself:
I accept the reality of this situation,
But not its permanence.”***

-Eric Butterworth