

Uses And Applications of Breathwork

by Dan Brulé

The Art and Science of breathwork involves the study and practice of breath awareness and conscious breathing for spirit, mind, and body. Breathworkers use the breath and breathing as a tool for health, growth, and change. Breathwork can be applied in order to trigger a cascade of beneficial physiological (chemical, neurological) responses. Breath and Breathing can unleash powerful healing forces within the mind and body, Breath Mastery can be used to enhance and accelerate human development and learning on many levels: physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, social...)

Leading medical experts and authorities agree that breath awareness and conscious breathing can be successfully applied in the prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery of a host of health conditions.

Breathing Energy Exercises and Techniques can trigger relaxation and relieve stress related disorders. (Stress and anxiety causes or aggravates most illnesses and diseases.) You can use breathwork to improve digestion, and to help alleviate indigestion and constipation. You can improve circulation and correct irregular (skipped) heartbeats (atrial fibrillation).

By controlling your breath, you can control the oxygen and carbon dioxide levels in your system. By controlling these levels, you can affect dilation and constriction of blood vessels. This means you can raise and lower your blood pressure, and improve nervous system function (activate, balance or calm the nervous system).

Breath Awareness, Breathing Techniques, and Breathing Exercises can be used for: insomnia, panic disorders, migraines, chronic neck and back pain, peptic ulcers, and many other conditions.

Conscious Breathing provides access to the unconscious mind, and can be used to integrate spirit, mind and body. Breath Awareness has long been associated with spiritual awakening and spiritual development; and over the last 25 years it has become a key element in cutting edge personal growth and self-improvement, and psychotherapy techniques.

Since ancient times, Breathing has been linked to expanding consciousness and reaching enlightenment. People all over the world are using Breathwork for meditation, and the martial arts, to perform better in the arts and in sports, and to deal more effectively with life changes and challenges.

Breathwork is the key to controlling the autonomic nervous system, to dealing with strong emotions, and for Behavior modification. Breathing is the only system in the body that is both totally voluntary and completely involuntary. In fact, unlike any other system in the body, the respiratory system has two separate sets of nerves and muscles. You can use the voluntary respiratory nerves and muscles to affect/effect changes in the involuntary nerves and muscles.

Do you know about the autonomic nervous system? It has two main branches: sympathetic and parasympathetic. The sympathetic is the exciting, activating branch (the fight or flight response), and the parasympathetic is the calming, re-balancing branch. That's why breath control can affect heart rate, blood pressure, skin temperature, digestive activities, chemical balances, etc. In fact, "autonomic nervous system imbalance" is the underlying cause of many diseases! Yet, this imbalance can be corrected with conscious breathing!

High blood pressure, for example, can be caused by over-stimulation of the sympathetic branch of the autonomic (involuntary) nervous system. Certain breathing patterns stimulate sympathetic nervous system activity, and certain breathing techniques quiet the sympathetic branch, and "turn on" the parasympathetic response. Breathwork may be the most cost effective and timely method

of self-help available today. It is certainly the quickest way to clear your head, calm your nerves, settle your stomach, open your heart.

Breathing keeps you grounded in your body and in present moment reality. The breath is a bridge between the conscious and unconscious mind. It opens the channel between those mental compartments. It stimulates exchange between the intellectual and the instinctual, the intuitive and the deductive aspect of the mind.

Breathwork allows you to access deep hidden corners of your psyche, and it brings up into the light of consciousness any negative programming, conditioning, etc. Putting your attention on the breath is like putting your attention in neutral. It is safe. By diverting attention from upsetting thoughts, feelings and images, it conserves mental energy. It pulls energy away from anxiety producing mental activity, dysfunctional self-talk, useless rational chatter, unhealthy habits, etc. In essence, with conscious breathing, one can, on their own, succeed where psychotherapy and pharmacology have failed.

Conscious breathing raises spiritual awareness. Turning to the breath is turning toward spirit. By turning to the breath, you turn toward your spiritual self, that non-physical yet essential aspect of your being.

Breathwork is the art of moving spiritual energy throughout the body. Breath is the movement of spirit in matter.

Andrew Weil pointed out an interesting fact: the word spirit has been used to refer to strong liquor (brandy, rum, vodka, etc.). For example, brandy is distilled wine. Brandy is the distilled "spirit" of wine, the concentrated source of its power. Wine was originally distilled down (into brandy) in order to decrease its volume for easier shipping. When it arrived on the other shore, they were supposed to add water to get back the wine, however it tasted too good, and it worked too well as it was! So, just as spirit was the essence of wine, breath is the spirit of life, the concentrated power or essence of physical being.

Everything breathes. Expansion and contraction, this oscillation between two poles, yin and yang, is the essence of breathing, and it can be seen everywhere, from the life of a star to the movement of the tides, to the universe itself (the big bang is like a giant exhalation, and physicists tell us that a contraction is sure to follow.)

Breathwork can be deceptively simple. When the sympathetic nervous system has been aroused (by a threat or a perceived threat—real or imagined, the breath responds in kind by becoming rapid, shallow, irregular. When the para-sympathetic branch kicks in following the resolution of the emergency, the breath becomes slower, deeper, and more regular.

Since when you are angry or upset, your breath becomes shallow, rapid, noisy, and irregular, in order to become calm again, all one needs to do is cause the breath to become deeper, slower, quieter, and more regular! And this is exactly how it works. By controlling the breath, and placing it into a parasympathetic pattern, you trick the nervous system into responding in a like fashion.

There is no doubt, that when you change your breathing, you change your chemistry, your physiology, and your biology! When you adjust your breathing, you adjust the state of your mind and body.

AN INTERESTING EXERCISE IN BREATH AWARENESS:

Notice that almost everyone conceives of a breathing cycle as an inhale followed by an exhale.

Yet in Yoga, and in Chi kung, the initial phase of breathing is the exhale, and it is followed by an inhale.

So, a surprisingly beneficial process is to observe your breath from that “exhale first” perspective.

Try it. Put the exhale first, and then follow your breathing in this manner for a few minutes. Deliberately breathe several complete cycles by emptying yourself first then inhaling. Empty yourself, squeeze more breath out, then inhale. Start the cycle again by exhaling and finish the cycle with an inhale. Then go back to the “inhale first” habit and notice what is different in your body.

Unrestricted breathing is vital to health and longevity. A healthy person should be able to breathe quickly (2, 3, or even 4 breaths per second!) for at least a few minutes. A healthy person should be able to breathe slowly (2, 3 or 4 breaths per minute) for at least a few minutes. A healthy person at rest should be able to allow a pause of at least 30 seconds after an exhale without discomfort. A Healthy person should be able to breath low in the belly, or high in the chest.

How healthy are you?

Did you know that the average person reaches peak respiratory function and lung capacity in their mid 20's? Then they begin to loose respiratory capacity: between 10% and 27% for every decade of life! So, unless you are doing something to maintain or improve your breathing capacity, it will decline, and with it, your general health, your life expectancy, and for that matter, your spirit too! It just goes to show you: don't underestimate the simple, basic, and obvious things in life!

Did you know that the respiratory system is responsible for eliminating 70% of your metabolic waste? (The remainder is eliminated thru defecation (3%), urination (7%), and perspiration (20%). So, if you think that going to the bathroom everyday is important, or that working up a good sweat now and then is healthy, think again about the value of full free breathing!

Did you know that most people have unhealthy breathing habits. They hold their breath or breathe high in the chest in a shallow, irregular manner. These patterns have been unconsciously adopted, accidentally formed, or emotionally impressed. Certain "typical" breathing patterns actually trigger physiological and psychological stress and anxiety reactions!

The way you breathe will either support or degrade your health and well-being. By learning Breath Awareness and practicing certain breathing techniques, you can literally change your life!

Isn't it good to know that the secret of optimum health and peak performance is right under your nose? Are you surprised that the simple things in life are the most powerful?

http://breathmastery.com/better_breath.htm