

## Breathing Notes

Breathing properly and deeply helps a person to relax, increases the amount of oxygen in the blood, carries more energy to the muscles and assists with the removal of waste products from the body.

Proper breathing comes from the diaphragm. During inhalation, the diaphragm should move down slightly, creating a vacuum in the lungs, and so, filling the lungs up from the bottom.

### Deep Breathing

Think of the lungs as three parts, lower, middle and upper sections.

Inhalation. Fill the lower section first by pushing the diaphragm down and the abdomen out. Next fill the middle section by expanding the chest cavity, then fill the final top section last by raising the chest and shoulders slightly. All three stages progress smoothly and continuously. Hold the breath for several seconds.

Exhalation. Pull the abdomen in, lowering the chest and shoulders to empty the lungs. Empty the air in reverse order, first the top, then middle, then bottom sections of the lungs. Pull the abdomen in further to expel all air from the lungs. Let go of all muscle tension in the abdomen and chest.

Do this over and over, for about 30-40 breaths each day. Practise daily, perhaps before going to sleep each night. Take long, slow, deep breaths through the nose, inhaling as much air as possible.

Exhalation should be slow and complete, feeling all the tension leaving the body as air leaves the lungs.

Get into the habit of practising deep breathing. For example, take one deep breath, and exhale fully before answering the phone. Or do so every time you check the time on your wristwatch. Importantly, use this breathing to relax yourself before races, or other times you are feeling stressed.

For athletes: The process of centering (getting balanced, getting ready to work, getting ready to execute a skill) during a race also involves some brief deep breathing. For example, use this as you are assembling at the start line, or putting your race gear, or helmet on, etc. Or ‘sighing with exhalation’ – see below – if you are getting too tense.

### Sighing with Exhalation

Inhale slowly, and hold your breath for 10 seconds. Feel the tension grow in the throat and chest.

Exhale through the mouth with a small ‘sigh’, as you let go of the tension in the rib cage. Do nothing with the inhalation, just let this happen naturally. Repeat several times, holding the breath after inhalation.

Feel the stillness after all the tension drains away as you breathe all the air out, with a sigh.

Do several times, then continue without holding your breath but keep the sighs going as you exhale through your mouth. Experience the peace and the quietness at the end of the exhalation. This is you learning to relax.

Whenever you feel like you are getting tense, practise this breathing for short periods. Feel the relaxation after the exhalation through the mouth. Feel all the tension drifting away as you do this. You are relaxing and soon you will feel calmer.

### Rhythmic Breathing

Inhale to the count of 4, hold breath to the count of 4, exhale to the count of 4, pause between breaths to the count of 4. Repeat over. Or change the rhythm to a different count as feels comfortable.

### **1:2 Ratio**

One period to inhale, twice the period to exhale.

Take a deep full breath in and count to 4 (or 5) as you are doing this. Exhale slowly and double the count to 8 (or 10). Practise this until the count is in the 1:2 ratio. If you are not making the second count for exhalation, slow down the out-breath.

### **5:1 Count**

Say to yourself and visualise the number 5 as you take a deep, full slow breath. Exhale fully and completely. Mentally count and visualise the number 4 with your next inhalation. During the exhalation, say to yourself, 'I am more relaxed now than I was at number 5'. Do not rush this thought. Inhale while mentally counting and visualising the number 3. With the exhalation, say to yourself, 'I am more relaxed now than I was at number 4'. Allow yourself to feel the deepening relaxation. Continue until you reach number 1. Tell yourself you are feeling calm and relaxed. Repeat again several times, again counting down from 5 each time.

### **Concentration Breathing**

Focus all attention on your breathing rhythm. If your mind wanders, redirect your attention back to your breathing. Breathing in, breathing out. In, out. Concentrate on the rhythm of your breathing. Think only of your breathing, its rhythm. Relax the body, let all tension leave the body with each exhalation. Think of nothing but the breathing. Let go, just concentrate on breathing.

This is a good exercise for people who may be affected by distracting thoughts.