

ABDOMINAL BREATHING

Breathing is the essence of life. We can breathe consciously and unconsciously. By breathing consciously, we can influence the other systems in our body which often operate unconsciously. For example, by deliberately breathing slower and deeper, our heart rate slows down, our blood pressure lowers, our muscles relax, we sweat less, etc. By paying conscious attention to our breathing we can thus reduce the effects of stress and relax more easily.

We can breathe in two different ways. If the respiration mainly takes place in the upper portions of the lungs, the breast moves up and down, this is the chest breathing. If the respiration goes deep into the lungs, the belly moves up and down, this is the abdominal breathing. To see if you have a chest or abdominal breathing pattern, place your right hand on your chest and your left hand on your belly. Look at which hand goes up more when you breathe. If your right hand moves principally, then you have a chest breathing pattern. If on the contrary your left hand moves primarily, then you have an abdominal breathing pattern.

People who deal with chronic stress, usually have a chest breathing. This kind of breathing is often faster and more superficial than the abdominal breathing. If we want to breathe consciously, we will concentrate on deep, slow abdominal breathing associated with the relaxation response. The relaxation response is opposite to the stress response which results in a decrease of tension in the body and a sense of general relaxation. The abdominal breathing provides immediate benefits for the physical and emotional health. If you practice abdominal breathing regularly and accurately, long-term improvements will also occur.

If you usually have a chest breathing, it is important to carry out abdominal breathing consciously. At first it may be a bit difficult, especially if you are suffering from a lot of stress for a long time. The message is to persevere and to keep practicing. With time you will notice that the abdominal breathing becomes easier! This is important as the abdominal breathing is the basis for all subsequent exercises.

Put one hand on your chest, the other on your belly. Take a few calm breaths in and out. In ... and out. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose and exhale gently through your mouth. In ... and out. In ... and out. Observe your breathing.

You are aiming for successful abdominal breathing. This means that the hand on your belly goes up more with each deep breath. Inhale, your belly goes up ... and exhale, your belly goes down. Again. Inhale, your belly goes up ... and exhale, your belly goes down.

Inhale deeply through your nose, your lungs fill up with air completely allowing your abdomen to rise. Hold a moment. And exhale quietly and slowly through your mouth. Let your lungs deflate entirely, but do not force it. You can gently tighten your abdominal muscles to blow out the remaining air in your lungs. Try it. Take a deep breath... and breathe out slowly and quietly. Remember that you relax more because of the full and slow exhalation rather than through the deep inhalation. So inhale ... and exhale slowly and completely. Try to make your exhalation longer than your inhalation.

We'll be doing this a few times now. Inhale deeply ... hold for a moment and exhale slowly and calmly. In ... and out (pew). In ... and out (pew). In ... and out (pew). One last time ... In and out (pew).

Well done, this is the abdominal breathing.