



The Toa of Natural Breathing

By Donna Mitchell

Breathing is the most simple and inexpensive way to reduce stress. True breathing, nonetheless, is innate. However, most people today have lost this simple, inborn trait; and its effects can be harmful. In **The Toa of Natural Breathing** by Dennis Lewis, he explains the importance of the easiest, most natural act we can do for increased energy and well-being: to breathe. Not just the feel of air pumping in and out of our nose, but to really *breathe*.

There are three fundamental phases of the breathing process: diaphragmatic, thoracic, and clavicular. In deep breathing, all three come into play- the lower ribs expand slightly and the upper abdomen protrudes, thus oxygenating the lower lung fields. Then the middle portion of the lungs expands with outward chest movement as inhalation proceeds further. At the very end, more air is admitted by slightly raising the clavicles (the bone extending from the breast bone), expanding the uppermost tips of the lungs. No matter what state we may be in, most of us depend on clavicle and chest breathing, and seldom draw in oxygen into the deepest part of our lungs through diaphragmatic breathing.

If you have ever watched a child breathing, the whole abdomen protrudes in and out. You do not see most adults breathing with their whole diaphragm- probably too busy sucking their stomach in for that flat belly look. This becomes a habit, thus our breathing becomes superficial and we lack the needed oxygen for our organs.

Our body needs oxygen! Breathing based on these bad habits has harmful effects on our body. With natural abdominal breathing, we can take fewer, more beneficial breaths, as opposed to two or three times as many quick, less beneficial breaths. Seventy percent of the body's waste products are eliminated through the lungs; and quick breaths only retard the venous blood flow which carries away metabolic wastes before they do harm. The practice of abdominal breathing has a powerful influence on the digestion of the food by GI peristalsis, blood flow, and food absorption.

There are so many other benefits to deep breathing. Thousands of scientific studies have shown that negative ions (the good ions) are extremely important to our health. Negative ions favor the passage of oxygen through the air cell membranes, thus efficiently absorbing it in the blood. According to Robert Ornstein, Ph.D. and David Sorbel, M.D., "negative ions have been shown to increase brain serotonin." This means we can put down that chocolate candy bar and take a breath in order to get that same "happy high," we are craving.

Lewis offers numerous techniques on breathing. My favorite is the smiling breath. We have all heard of the power of laughter. If you haven't, think of something funny, or just make yourself laugh... do you feel it now? Feels goooood doesn't it. Taoists believe that when we smile, our



organs release a honey-like secretion that nourishes our whole body. Sweet thought. However, when we are angry or under stress, we produce poisonous secretions that block our energy channels, resulting in high blood pressure and indigestion, for example. “Smiling” into our organs, causes them to expand, becoming “softer, moister, and more efficient.” To experience this technique: focus on your eyes, rotate them, and relax them. Let the sensation of relaxation spread through your face; now visualize someone you care about smiling at you. Now include your deep breathing technique. Sense your breath being touched by the smile on your face. As you continue to breathe, notice more saliva collecting in your mouth, but don’t swallow. Science has shown that saliva contains a variety of proteins, including hormones and other substances that have digestive, antibacterial, mineral-building, and other health functions. The next steps are to “smile into your organs” flowing downward; now swallow your saliva, leading your breath downward into your body, throughout your body (the brain and spine). Sense your abdomen expanding as you sense your smiling breath. As you exhale, do so gently through your mouth. This technique frees your energy from tension and negativity. Lewis’s version is more detailed, I condensed it for simplicity.

Your turn: take what you like about this lesson in breathing and be conscious of yourself as you are breathing. More than likely, you have spent many years breathing from your chest, instead of your abdomen. It may take some time to teach yourself all over again, but it is well worth it.

Donna Mitchell is a graduate from San Diego State University and a current Dietetic Intern for Patton State Hospital. She enjoys reading on Complimentary and Alternative Medicine, baking, and creating other culinary concoctions. Donna hopes to further her education in Naturopathic Medicine and open a natural foods bakery in the near future.