

Breathing should not be taken for granted

By Mandy Kendall

How often do you think about the way you breathe? If you're like most people, it is something we don't have to think about ... so we don't. There is so much else going on in our lives, who has time to concentrate on breathing!? It happens without us thinking about it so why do we need to?

Well, there are many reasons to spend a little time focusing on this very important, life giving, practice. Here are just a few of them:

Our cells need oxygen – Our cells are very reliant on oxygen to perform all of their functions and produce energy. Some research has shown that cancer cells thrive in low oxygen environments, so this is another reason to keep your body flooded with oxygen.



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Fill your lungs – Your lungs need the action of fully inflating to keep the tissue healthy and free from mucus and infections.

Aid digestion – By breathing deeply, and pushing your diaphragm down into your lower belly, you gently massage your intestines and bowel, helping with the physical act of

elimination.

Detox – Your breath is one of the main pathways for toxins to be carried out of the body (that's why they use breathalyzer tests to detect toxins like alcohol in the blood).

Lymph circulation – This is another system that helps carry toxins out of the body and relies on the respiratory system for its circulation.

Increases oxygen to the heart – The heart muscle works very hard and requires a lot of oxygen to ensure proper functioning.

Immune system – Relies on oxygen to repair cells, heal damaged tissue and fight infections.

Feed your brain – Oxygen is vitally important to keep our brain cells alive and healthy.

Keep wrinkles at bay – Oxygen rich blood helps feed your skin (the largest organ in the body) and wrinkles can be reduced by improved circulation.

Calm things down – Deep breathing relaxes the body, helps remove stress hormones from the blood, releases endorphins (happy hormones) and is a natural painkiller.

So how do we breathe better? Here are a few *Qwik-e* tips to get you started.

Belly pushups – Lie down and place one hand on your belly button and one hand on your ribs just below your collarbone. Then try breathing slowly, but deeply, down into your lower belly so that only the hand on your belly button moves up and down. If you feel a slight tight sensation in between your hands (around the base of your ribs) this might suggest that you've not been using your diaphragm that much and it's not used to stretching down into your lower belly to allow your lungs to fully inflate. Like any muscle that isn't used very

much, it will improve with practice and use. This is great to try in the morning before you get out of bed and also last thing at night before you go to sleep.

Shoulders down – Another way of making sure you are breathing fully is to sit or stand comfortably, then just be aware of any movement in your shoulders while you are breathing. If your shoulders lift up and down, as you breathe in and out, this also suggests that you are only using a small part of your lung capacity, and also tightening shoulder and neck muscles at the same time. Try to breathe slowly and deeply into your lower belly and keep your shoulders down and relaxed. Watching yourself in the mirror helps with this at first. It's often best to try this one sitting down first as a flush of oxygen into your body may make you a little light headed, in a good way.

Counting breaths – Counting as you breathe in and out will give you an idea of how much air you are taking in. If you can only comfortably inhale (at your normal rate) for a count of 3 or 4 that may mean you are only partially inflating your lungs. Aim to increase the length of time you breathe in, and then match that number as you breathe out. So, if you can count to 5 breathing in, count to 5 as you're breathing out. Then see if you can take a little longer each time.

Until next time.

Mandy Kendall operates Health Connective in South Lake Tahoe, which aligns wellness seekers with their ideal wellness provider. If you have questions, would like some advice, or would like to request some Qwik-e tips on any health and well-being topic, drop her an email at connect@healthconnective.com or keep an eye out on Lake Tahoe News for regular Qwik-e tips on how to make healthy changes one Quick and Easy step at a time.