

Breathing well is also good for the mind

Breathing is fundamental for our body's ability to function at its very best. By taking advantage of a few simple tips we can rectify this problem, caused by the frenetic pace and stress of modern life. By slowing down and prolonging our breaths we can live longer.

On the face of it breathing is apparently one of the simplest and most instinctive things a person does. In reality it is neither obvious nor ordinary.

We carry oxygen to our body and brain by breathing and we expel carbonic anhydride. Oxygen cannot be stored; it has to be constantly and regularly replenished and this is the reason it is essential to breathe properly, so that all of our organs, including the brain and entire cell structure, can live.

Have you ever asked yourself how well you know your own breathing? How you breathe throughout the day? What happens to your breath when you are alarmed? Or how you breathe during physical exercise?

An adult man, when resting, absorbs 400-500 liters of oxygen during the course of 24 hours and expels 300-400 liters of carbonic anhydride. How does breathing work? First of all we should know that correct breathing is the basis of our physical and mental wellbeing: breathing slowly and regularly, in fact, rebalances the nervous system. Additionally, every time we breathe each cell in the body has the possibility to feed and multiply, and, every time that the lungs are filled with air internal organs are massaged and freed from internal tension caused by the movement of the chest cage. Unfortunately, most of us are only using a third of the actual breathing capacity at our disposal.

In order to be perfectly in tune with the body the most correct way to breathe is from the diaphragm. It's not a coincidence that people who work out do just that, as do those involved in sports like martial arts and others where you need concentration and precision (especially archery or target shooting).

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To see whether you are breathing properly look into a mirror and breathe deeply. If your shoulders rise when you inhale you are not doing it correctly; if your shoulders don't move and the air taken in inflates the abdomen then you are. The main problem when breathing incorrectly is that only the top part of the lungs are being used. And why? Once again, the frenetic pace of daily life and the stress that we are all victims of is to blame. Children, on the other hand, breathe 'with their stomachs'. If we breathed correctly we would all be healthy, stronger and more serene.

Is it a coincidence that a lot of expressions are connected to breathing? 'Breathing a sigh of relief', 'shouting at the top of our lungs', 'taking a breath of fresh air', but also 'feeling suffocated', 'it takes your breath away' - they all refer to our state of being.

At the same time, we often feel tired, incapable, and numb or, here we go again, stressed-out. Simply put, when emotions are exaggerated compared to an external stimulus it means that there is not enough oxygen in the body and mind: clarity is lost and our mood suffers.

Additionally, inadequate breathing means an increase of substances in the blood which spell danger to vital functions. Under these conditions we become physically fragile and vulnerable. How can we improve this state? A lack of physical exercise, for example, is one of the main causes of low oxygen in the blood, but even when doing sports not everyone automatically breathes correctly: advice on the matter should be sought from qualified instructors.

Read on for a few tips concerned with learning to breathe with the diaphragm: Inhale slowly so that the lungs increase in volume and get bigger, in turn causing the abdomen to inflate and enlarge. The lower ribs slowly open thanks to the air contained in the lower area of the lungs. The diaphragm drops and is put to use directly according to the quantity of air that is stored. At this point hold your breath for a few seconds before exhaling, controlling the abdominal muscles in order to put the correct pressure on the diaphragm and regulate the lungs' emptying of air. Movements should be carried out slowly, which also contributes to relaxing the mind.

As a final note: in Tibetan Buddhism length of life is defined by the number of breaths each human has at his disposal, from birth. Based on this concept it could be said that if we slow down and prolong our breathing we will live longer; it's what the Lama persistently try to do.

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