

Every Breath you Take

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Some cultures believe that the physical manifestation of our inner being is through something that we do every moment of our lives- breathe! The first thing that a baby does as it leaves the womb is to draw breath, as such, the air we take in is often regarded as the elixir of life.

Air flows between us, in and out of us and connects us to the world around. It is the one thing that all living organisms share. The air that we breathe is our closest and most important contact with the external environment. In fact, our health is often influenced by the quality of air, as well as the manner in which we breathe.

As people the world over adopt a more holistic approach towards healthcare, the importance of environment is increasingly prevalent. Many doctors now recommend oxygen therapy for a number of illness conditions. Tibb advocates breathing as part of health maintenance regarding it as one of the essential lifestyle factors, alongside diet, exercise, rest patterns, emotional well-being and elimination.

Breathing is the one bodily function that we do both voluntarily and involuntarily. Ayurvedic practitioners believe that, *breathing is the physical part of thinking and thinking is the psychological part of breathing.* This is true when we consider that every thought we have, changes the rhythm of breath. When one is happy and at peace, breathing is rhythmic. If one is anxious or nervous, breathing becomes irregular and interrupted. How many times have we not told ourselves to *take a deep breath* when faced with anger or fear? What is remarkable is that, in many situations, through controlling our breathing, we can consciously influence the sympathetic nervous system that regulates blood pressure, heart rate, circulation, digestion and many other bodily functions.

Without the air we breathe, the nutrients we take into our body could not be converted into energy. Oxygen intake is also vital to our brain cells. Common ailments such as headaches, tiredness and irritability are often the direct result of insufficient oxygen intake. That is why the implementation of healthy breathing habits are important in the quest for good health.

Research has shown that regular breathing exercises helps to:

- Neutralise excessive heat and maintain an ideal body temperature.
- Regulate the heartbeat.
- Strengthen the nerves and settle the emotions.
- Cleanse the body of waste matter and toxins.
- Increase metabolism.
- Increase blood circulation to the deeper tissues and capillaries
- Rejuvenate the cells.

Unfortunately, due to pollutants in the air, bad habits and our stressful lives, most of us tend to draw breath using the upper chest instead of the entire lungs. Chest breathing is inefficient because the greatest amount of blood flow occurs in the lower lobes of the lungs. Rapid, shallow, chest breathing results in less oxygen transfer to the blood and subsequent poor delivery of nutrients to the tissues.

Tibb advises breathing exercises as part of one's daily routine. These exercises will have different effects on the body depending on the technique used. Slow breathing exercises will produce less heat and are meant for calming and relaxation, whilst rapid breathing will encourage oxygen flow, circulation and increased heat in the body.

Two easy, effective breathing techniques that you can try at home are:

1.TIBB DEEP RHYTHMIC BREATHING EXERCISE (Cooling and Calming)

- Sitting comfortably, breathe in deeply and slowly through your nose. Push out your stomach and visualize air filling the lungs.
- Tilt your head slowly towards the chest and hold your breath as long as possible.
- Then, slowly raising your head, exhale forcefully through the mouth as if you are blowing air into the distance. Make an ‘O’ shape with your mouth.
- The exercise should be repeated between 3 and 15 times.

2 .TIBB FAST BREATHING EXERCISE (Increases heat and dispels toxins)

- Sit comfortably on the floor, in either a squatting or the lotus pose.(basic Yoga position) You can use pillows to support yourself. Keep the back as straight as possible, and ensure that you are in a quiet space.
- Take slow and deep breaths, breathing in and out through the nose, distending and filling the stomach. Repeat until you are comfortable, for about 10 counts.
- Slowly begin breathing deeper and faster, all the while pushing the navel in and out whilst breathing through the nostrils.
- Continue for about 3 minutes. You will feel a metallic taste on the tip of the tongue, and slight dizziness as oxygen reaches the brain.
- With experience, this exercise can be extended to 4 or 5 minutes.
- End by taking slow and deep breaths for another minute.

Breathing exercises are most beneficial when performed at dawn as pollution levels are lower and the air is still filled with some moisture. Performed regularly, the benefits of breathing correctly will have profound benefits to body, mind and soul. Above all remember that to breathe is to live so live your life to its fullest, “***Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away!***” (Anon)

More information on breathing exercises can be found in the Tibb book, ***4 Temperaments, 6 Lifestyle Factors by Prof. Rashid Bhikha*** or attend the Tibb Healthy Living workshop for your personalized lifestyle programme.

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