

BREATHING

Deep Breathers Make Better Performers

Now obviously you already know how to breathe. This chapter isn't going to teach you that. What it *will* do is show you the power of that simple act you perform mindlessly approximately 28,000 times a day. And it will show you how you can use breathing to control your neurotransmitters and energy level so you can put yourself in High Positive any time you want.

For starters, try this experiment:

Take a lot of quick short breaths. Keep it up for 2 minutes (but stop if you get dizzy). If you can pant for 2 minutes you'll begin to feel nervous. If you close your eyes while you do it, you'll probably see unpleasant images. As soon as you stop, take your pulse. Is it faster than normal? It should be, because you will have placed yourself in a state of fear.

Surprised? Try another experiment:

Breathe slowly and deeply — in through your nose for 4 counts, then out through your mouth for 6 counts. Close your eyes and imagine your breath going all the way to the tips of your toes and all the way to the ends of the earth. Do you feel relaxed? When you stop, take your pulse. It should be slower than normal.

This set of reactions is called the “fight or flight response” because it prepared our ancestors to either fight the animals or flee from them. While today most of us have few opportunities to meet wild animals, the fight or flight response still happens whenever we feel afraid or suddenly alarmed. That’s what makes you jump out of the way of an oncoming car. It’s even what makes you snap back angrily when someone says something that annoys you.

that they can
20 pounds more if they
breathe out as they lift
the iron!

So you can see that rapid breathing is one way to increase your epinephrine and norepinephrine levels. It’s not a good way to get into High Positive, though, because it increases them too much. Instead of making you feel energized and ready to perform, it makes you feel tense, nervous and ready to fight. A better way is through slow, deep breathing.

You think all this stuff about breathing is a lot of hot air? A psychologist named Sheila Sperber Haas studied 160 healthy adults and found that the way people breathe says a lot about their personalities. People who breathe rapidly and shallowly tend to be shy, fearful and insecure. People who breathe long and deep tend to be more sure of themselves and more adventurous. Scientists don’t know exactly why this is so, but we do know that controlling your breath can control the way you feel. So if you want to feel more confident and secure, it makes sense to slow down your breathing and inhale deeply.

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Slow, deep breathing shifts you into High Positive because it causes several changes in your body.

- 1. It makes your heart beat slow down.**
- 2. It makes your muscles loosen.**
- 3. It gives you just the right amount of epinephrine and norepinephrine.**

As a result of these changes, you feel relaxed. At the same time, deep breathing increases the amount of oxygen in your cells, which gives you energy.

PUTTING IT TO WORK

Try the following deep breathing exercises when you want to get into High Positive or when you’re feeling tense and want to relax. You can do them quickly and easily in school, during a game, out with friends, or wherever you happen to be. →

The Yawn

Do you know why you yawn? It's because your energy is low and you're not breathing in as much air as you need. So your body forces you to breathe. The oxygen you inhale gives you energy. But you don't have to wait for a natural yawn to get a shot of breath-energy. You can do it on your own.

1. Stand up.
2. Raise your hands high over your head.
3. Push your stomach out.
4. Breathe in as much air as you can.
5. Breathe it all out in a big, noisy breath.

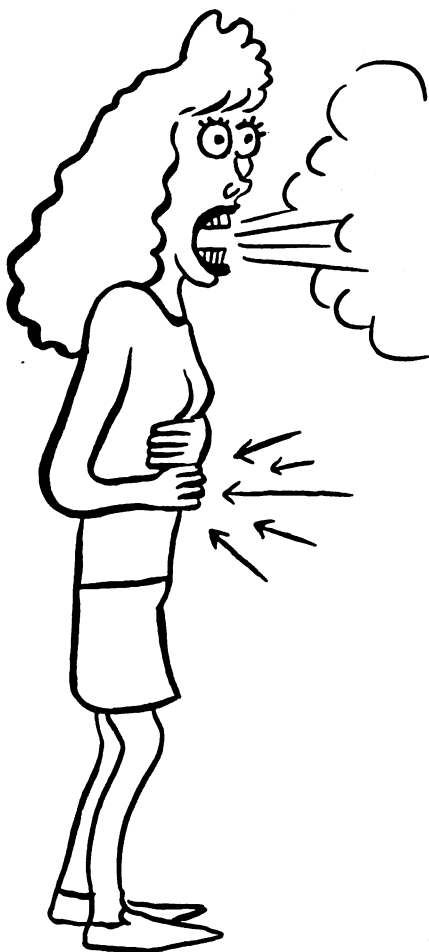


The Belly Breath

You can do this any time, sitting or standing, but it's easiest to learn while lying down, or while standing up and bending over at the waist.

1. Lie on your back with your hands on your stomach — between the bottom of your rib cage and your belly button.
2. Push your stomach out; feel your hands rise.
3. After your hands start to rise, breathe in through your nose. "Aim" the breath at your stomach and count slowly one-two. Then aim it at your lungs and count three-four.
4. Now exhale. First breathe out the air you put in your lungs while you count one-two. Then empty out the air you put in your stomach and count three-four-five-six-seven-eight.
5. Push your stomach out and start again.

If you practice this for a few minutes each day, you'll be able to do it standing or sitting, whenever you feel tense or need to perform.



The Ha! Breath

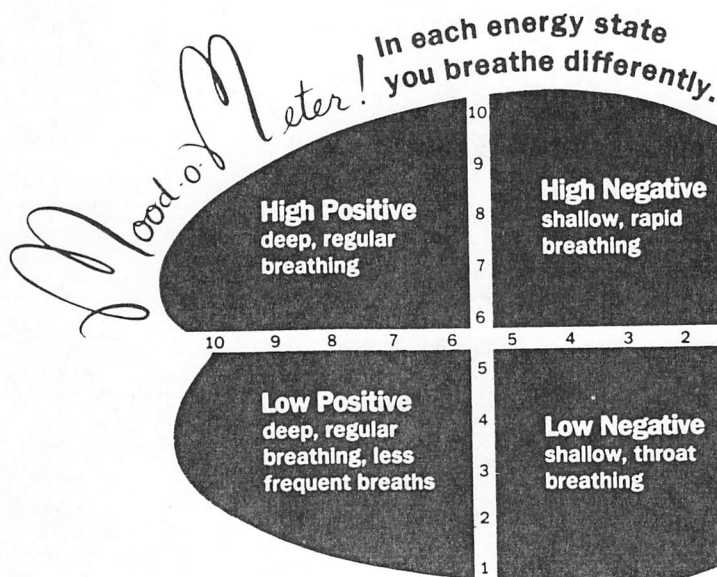
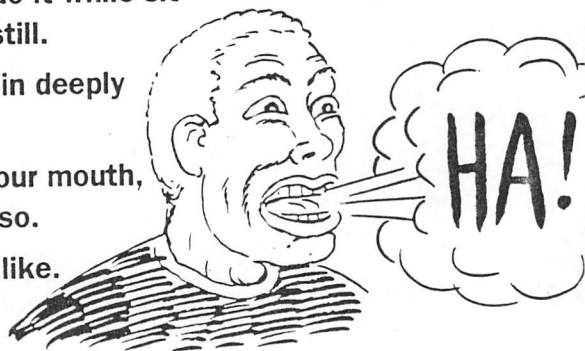
This kind of breathing happens automatically when you laugh. (That's one of the reasons laughing is good for performance.) It also happens a lot in sports. You've seen tennis players grunt when their rackets meet the ball, or weightlifters grunt as they hoist the iron. They're getting an instant shot of oxygen-energy which relaxes them and gets them ready for their next move. You can do the Ha! Breath without lifting a tennis racket or an iron weight. In fact, you can do it while sitting, walking, running or standing still.



1. Tilt your head back and breathe in deeply through your nose.

2. Breathe out forcefully through your mouth, making a "Ha!" sound while you do so.

3. Repeat it as many times as you like.



The human body can survive for weeks without eating and days without drinking, but the brain can manage for less than five minutes without oxygen!