

Just Breathe!

Breathing

Thanks to your body's respiratory system we usually breathe 12 - 20 times in a minute without giving it any thought. Your lungs - which are not hollow like balloons, but made of spongy, flexible tissue, expand as they bring in oxygen-enriched air with each inhale and contract getting rid of carbon dioxide with each exhale.

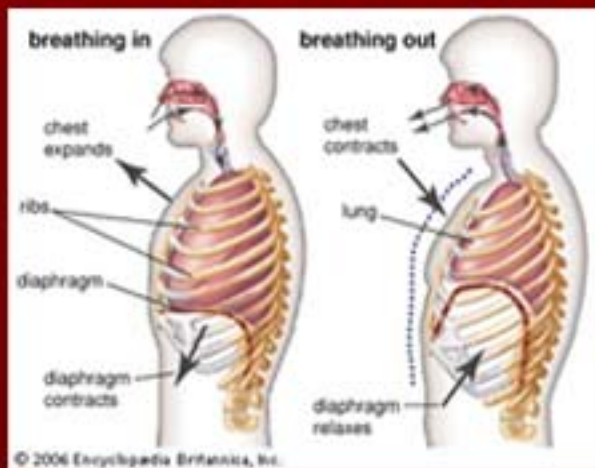
The inhalation begins when your diaphragm (a large dome-shaped muscle under the lungs - see picture) contracts, creating a vacuum and a change of pressure in your lungs causing air to flow in. When your diaphragm relaxes, your chest cavity gets smaller, the pressure changes again and your lungs deflate causing the exhalation.

Your Breath

Take a moment and notice how you're breathing. As you shift your attention to your breath did your breathing change or is it as it was when your focus was elsewhere? What part of your breathing did you bring your attention to - the movement of your body as your lungs expand and contract? The length of your inhales and exhales? Or maybe your attention was drawn to the sensation of your breath entering and exiting though the nose.



Our breath is a reflection of our physical and mental state. When you're calm your breath is much different then when you're anxious or stressed. When you're relaxed your breath is much different then when you're active. The position or your body or movements that you make will also effect how you breathe.



Just as your body and mind effect how you breathe, how you breathe can affect your mental and physical state. In yoga we practice Pranayama, which is the science of breath control. The practice of Pranayama helps clear and cleanse the body and mind and forms a connection between the two. It's used in the practice of yoga asanas/postures to help maximize the benefits of the poses and helps keep the mind focused. It also helps prepare the body and mind for meditation.

Become aware of your breath. Experiment with how you can deepen and be more effective with your breathing by letting your belly draw out with each inhale, creating more room for your diaphragm to contract and lungs to expand fully. Begin to notice the differences in your breathing as your behavior, actions and moods change. Explore the affects your breath can have on your physical and mental state just by shifting your attention to one of the aspects mentioned in one of the earlier paragraphs - movement, length, or sensation.

Without breath there is no life. Learn to appreciate your breath and discover the real benefits that come with each inhale and exhale.

