



# BE WELL MAGAZINE

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## Breath awareness - a skill worth cultivating!

"Breathing is the key that unlocks the whole catalogue of advanced biological function and development. Is it any wonder that it is so central to every aspect of health? Breathing is the first place, not the last, one should look when fatigue, disease, or other evidence of disordered energy presents itself. Breathing is truly the body's most basic communication system." - Sheldon Saul Hendler, MD, Ph.D., *The Oxygen Breakthrough*.

We've been breathing all of our lives but just how well do we actually do it? How many of us are aware of its potential to promote health benefits?

Most people don't breathe well at all. In fact, as a society, we rate poorly in the breathing department. The average person can live for a few weeks without food, three to five days without water (depending on circumstances) and approximately five minutes without breathing. In our community we look at the quality and frequency of our daily food and water intake and the effect they each have on our health and wellbeing. However, as a general rule, we don't give the same attention to the quality and frequency of our breathing.

### Good breathing habits

Good breathing habits are vitally important to our wellbeing and quality of life!

Even though we know we can't live very long without this precious and life-giving process, most people don't focus on their breathing, unless it becomes a problem in some way. For most of us breathing is just an unconscious, automatic process that takes care of itself.

One thing you might not have considered about breathing is that it has the function of dual control - meaning that it can be controlled by both the conscious mind and the unconscious mind through the autonomic system.

Once you consciously learn how to correctly *drive* this wonderful, energy-boosting, highly intelligent function of breathing - and you practise it daily - it can become a skill you can use to help you consciously slow the mind, calm the emotions, and relax the body. It can help bring harmony, balance and a new sense of personal freedom into your life.

When you're under pressure your breathing becomes shorter and faster. The body generally responds to this shallow breathing by tensing up, which can then produce a level of stress and discomfort. The stress hormone cortisol rises, which can put pressure on your body systems. Over an extended period of time, poor breathing habits can adversely affect your health. Life is challenging at the best of times, so next time you're traversing a

bumpy road on life's journey, remember you already have the perfect tool on hand, or should I say 'on nose', to help you get to where you need to be.

By becoming aware of your breath, and being able to consciously control your breathing, you can learn how to bring yourself back in to a state of balance anytime, and anywhere, regardless of what's happening to you and around you. Once you become an aware and skilled breather, you will marvel at the difference it can make to your mental, emotional and physical health. I know from personal experience that you can feel like you have a new lease on life.

I became a breathworker, breathing and life coach after having my own stress and anxiety breakdown more than two decades ago. I speak frankly about my breakdown and recovery in my book, *Living Beyond Stress, Anxiety & Overwhelm: 9 Steps to Freedom*. Learning to breathe correctly transformed my shattered health and life, and took me on a totally new pathway - opening up a career path that wouldn't have been possible without reaching breaking point. Now I travel Australia teaching people stress and anxiety management skills and mind wellness. I love it -- the journey has been amazing!

### **Some simple steps to help develop breath awareness and better quality breathing**

1. **Establish your baseline rate of respiration.** Sit on a chair and time how many normal, average breaths you take per minute. It's easiest to count each inhalation.
2. **Slow your pace.** Observe your breath for 30 seconds and then begin to gently and slowly expand your inhale, making it deeper and longer.
3. **Continue.** Breathe deeply, slowly and gently for at least three to five minutes and you will begin to feel the benefit. You can safely breathe in this manner for up to 20 minutes at a time.
4. **Check your progress.** Check your respiration rate once you've ceased the practise. You may quickly begin to see that the lower your respiration rate, the more balanced and peaceful you may feel.
5. **Put it in to practise.** When you notice you're under pressure, or feeling stressed as you're going about your normal daily life, remember you can turn to your conscious breath - breathing slowly and deeply, which can help stabilise you while also oxygenating your cells and even energising your body. How clever is nature!

#### **Disclaimer**

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