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Movement is the Key



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1 THE BREATH

1.1 TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH

Breathing is one of the vital components of our health. Breathing brings in oxygen to fuel our body and to energize our cells.

Each cell produces waste which is expelled by our lungs. Shallow, inefficient breathing starves our bodies and allows waste products to build up.

We are born knowing how to breathe. Watch a baby breathing. You will see its abdomen rising and falling.

As we age our breathing rises to the chest. This is shallower breathing which insufficiently oxygenates the body and unsettles the mind. Chest-breathing can cause physical and mental imbalance.

To rejuvenate we must remember what we were born with and return to breathing with our abdomens. This is widely recognized. Most practices, such as, yoga, tai chi, martial arts, and meditation, begin by focusing on the breath. They teach abdominal breathing.

Abdominal breathing is done by expanding and contracting the abdominal cavity. This draws more air into the lungs. In addition, it moves the internal organs, massaging and stimulating them to work more efficiently. Our abdomen acts as a pump to push fluids, blood, and Qi, our vital energy, around the body keeping it functioning at a higher-level. Abdominal breathing circulates nutrients and flushes wastes.

Finally, slow deep breathing affects calms the nervous system and reduces anxiety, promoting mental health and tranquility.

2 ABDOMINAL BREATHING

2.1 REJUVENATION: BREATHING LIKE A BABY

We must *re-learn* to breath. We focus on doing abdominal breathing during our practices.

Abdominal breathing should be practiced until it becomes our normal way of breathing all the time. This is called 'Natural Breathing'.

Deep and effective breathing reaches all the way down to the abdomen. The abdomen expands forward, to the sides and toward the spine. The breathing movement can be felt all the way down to the pelvic area and up to the top of the lungs. Abdominal breathing has a calming and relaxing effect as we take fewer but more effective breaths. We absorb more oxygen and release more waste products.

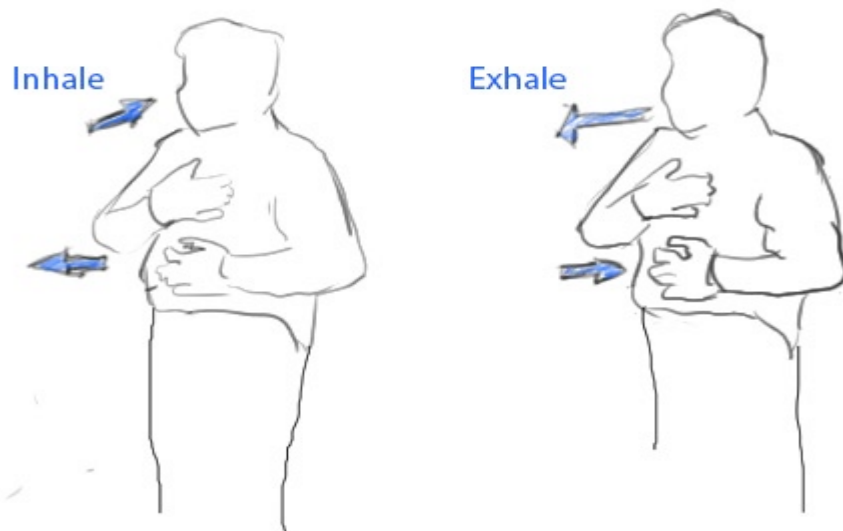
2.2 PRACTICING QIGONG: YOUR SECOND HEART

In Chinese practices, the mind and the body are connected by Qi (energy). One's Qi is controlled by the breath. 'Gong' means 'work' or 'practice'. Hence the term Qigong means 'breath work'. Learning to breath is the most important part of your practice.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) considers the abdomen the 'second heart'. 'Hearts' move fluids and energy around the body. To be healthy you must have this heart beating. This pumps body fluids, e.g., blood and lymph, preventing stagnation of fluids in the body and aiding digestion.

2.3 BENEFITS

1. Controls your emotions.
2. Allows greater expansion of the lungs making more oxygen available to the body.
3. Massages the internal organs promoting circulation of bodily fluids and energy. (lymph system)
4. Improves digestion.
5. Calms the mind and relieves stress. Calms nervous system.
6. Improves mental focus.
7. Deepens meditation
8. Tone core muscles



3 ABDOMINAL BREATHING: STANDING

1. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart.

2. Inhale by pushing out your lower abdomen. The hand on your chest should NOT move. The hand on your stomach should move out.
3. Exhale by pulling in your abdomen. The hand on your chest should NOT move. The hand on your stomach should move in.
4. Breathe slowly but in a relaxed manner.

3.1.1 Standing Qigong Tips

- Your navel should be going in and out.
- Focus **Intent** on lower abdomen while breathing.
- Use 'Standing in a Boat' movement to practice breathing with you whole body.

3.2 DAILY NATURAL BREATHING

Stand with your back straight. Breathe in and out by expanding and contracting your abdomen. Pushing your abdomen gently out when inhaling and pulling it in when exhaling. Your chest can stay relaxed.

Once you have started this you should practice for a few minutes several times during the day until it becomes your unconscious way of breathing.

This simple new habit is your first step to better health.

3.3 BREATHING DURING PRACTICE

When practicing your forms, such as, meditation or qigong, we are building up our lung capacity and our internal organ strength. During this time we want to put more focus into our breathing.

3.3.1 Exhale

- During exhalation we want to be sure we push all the stale air out of our lungs. This expels more waste and allow more oxygen to enter on the inhale.
- Age and gravity pull down our organs; during practice we compact our internal organs pulling them up and in. This strengthens the core muscles.
- There are 6 directions of compression as if our organs were in a box:
 - Pull navel and spine toward each other.
 - Pull up the perinium and draw down the diaphragm.
 - Pull in the side ribs.

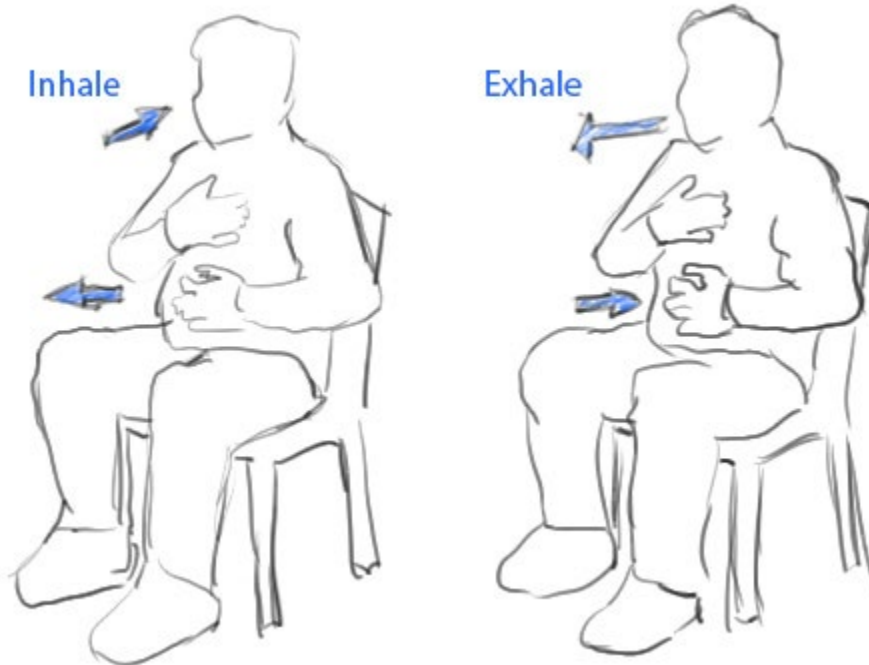
3.3.2 Inhale

- Take deeper breaths.
- Expand the back ribs as well as the abdomen. Build flexibility in the lower rib cage allow greater expansion and more oxygen.

4 ABDOMINAL BREATHING IN A CHAIR

1. Sit in a chair. If possible, leave a bit of space between your back and the chair.

2. Have your feet flat on the ground.
3. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Your chest should be relaxed.
4. Breathe in by pushing out your abdomen. The hand on your chest should NOT move. The hand on your stomach should move out
5. Breathe out by pulling in your abdomen. The hand on your chest should NOT move. The hand on your stomach should move in.
6. Breathe slowly but in a relaxed manner.

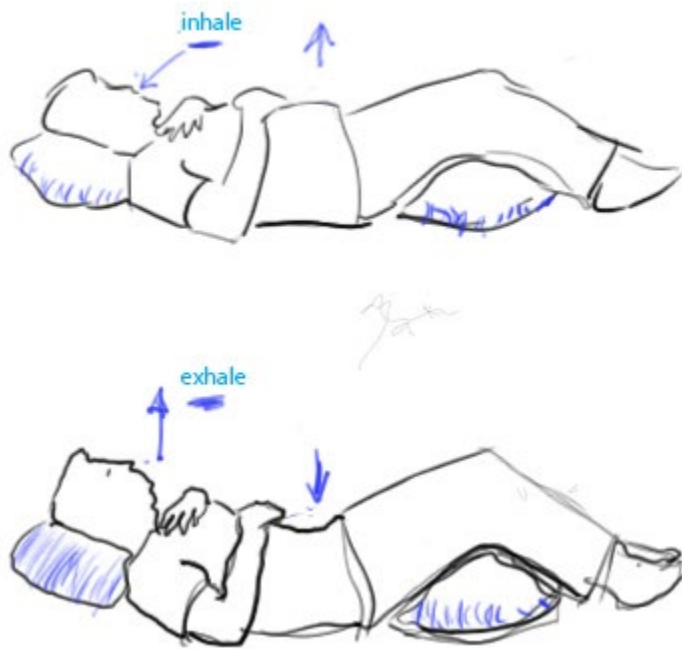


4.1.1 Seated Qigong Tips

- Erect posture.
- Flat feet when sitting
- Focus intent on lower abdomen
- Navel in and out.

5 YOU CAN PRACTICE QIGONG LYING DOWN AS WELL!

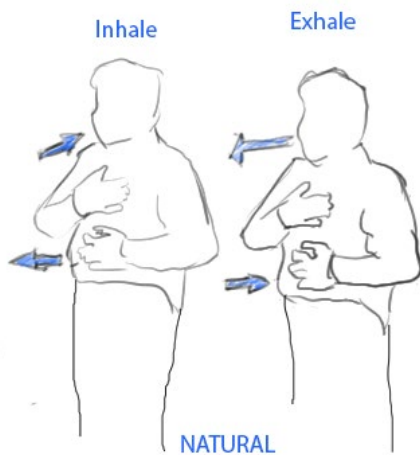
1. Lie on your back and support your knees and head.
2. One hand on your upper chest and one below your solar plexus.
3. Breathe in by pushing out your abdomen. The hand on your chest should NOT move. The hand under your solar plexus should move out
4. Breathe out by pulling in your abdomen. The hand on your chest should NOT move. The hand under your solar plexus should move in.
5. Breathe slowly but in a relaxed manner.



6 CATEGORIES OF BREATHING

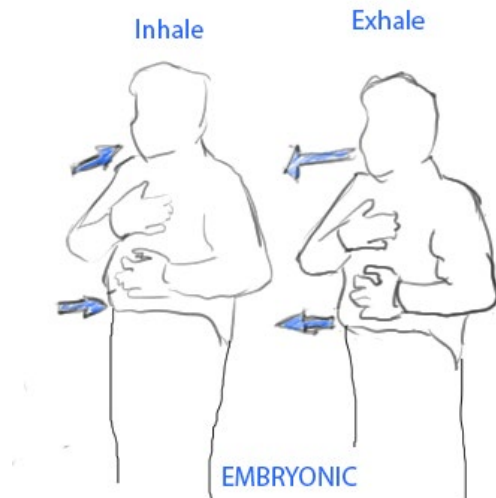
6.1 TWO CATEGORIES OF ABDOMINAL BREATHING

Two main categories of breathing are *Natural Breathing* and *Embryonic Breathing*. Both these use the abdomen for breathing (versus chest breathing).



6.2 NATURAL BREATHING

In Natural Breathing the abdomen goes out on the inhale and in on the exhale. This is the type of breathing taught by QOL Now. It promotes good fluid flow and massages the internal organs. With a few weeks of attention, this can become one's daily way of breathing. At QOL Now when we talk about 'abdominal breathing', we almost always mean Natural Breathing.



6.3 EMBRYONIC BREATHING

In Embryonic Breathing the abdomen is pulled in during the inhale and pushed out during the exhale. QOL Now utilizes this type of breathing when teaching certain specific practices.

This is named so because when a fetus is in the womb it takes in nourishment and expels wastes through the umbilical cord. To take in nutrients, it pulls in its abdomen. To expel wastes, it pushes out its abdomen.

After birth when breathing through the lungs, the process is reversed. The abdomen goes out to pull in air and in to expel air.

Sometimes Embryonic Breathing is referred to as 'Reverse Breathing'.

6.4 OTHER TERMINOLOGY

If you are reading Chinese texts, there are other translations for the names of these types of breathing.

'Before Heaven' refers to events that happen before one was born. 'After Heaven' refers to events that happen after birth. Thus, embryonic breathing is also referred to as 'Before Heaven Breathing'.

Natural Breathing is referred to as 'After Heaven Breathing'.

Taoists can use this type of breathing during certain practices, so it can also be called 'Taoist Breathing'.

6.5 OTHER SPECULATIONS

6.5.1 How many breaths per minute?

Normal breathing rate for an adult at rest is between 12 and 20 breaths per minute. Breathing more slowly can synchronize your various physiological rhythms (e.g., respiration, heartbeat, blood pressure) which show health and psychological benefits. Meditators can control their brain wave states. Research the web for a multitude of articles on the benefits of slow abdominal breathing. These effects seem to be particularly strong when breathing 5.5 times per minute.

Here we are working at creating a generally better level of health. So we want to become more aware of our breathing and alter our habits:

- 1) Natural Breathing is our normal daily manner of breathing.
- 2) Breathe more slowly in general. (Try to get to 5.5 bpm during sitting practice.)
- 3) Breathe through your nose. (If you have sinus problems, you may have to work up to this.) Our notes evolved to filter air and to control the temperature and humidity of our breath.

Example articles:

WHAT IS YOUR OPTIMAL BREATHING RATE AND WHY IT MATTERS

<https://sequencewiz.org/2020/08/19/what-is-your-optimal-breathing-rate-and-why-it-matters/>

A POPULARIZED ACCOUNT OF BREATHING TECHNIQUES:

Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art by James Nestor