



The best anti-stress
medicine we have may be

Right Under Your Nose

By CAROL KRUCOFF
From WASHINGTON POST

THINK YOU know how to do it? Try this simple test: sit or stand wherever you are and take a deep breath, then let it out. What expanded more as you inhaled, your chest or your belly? If the answer is your chest, you're like most people and you're doing it wrong. Take another deep breath—and keep reading.

THE TECHNIQUE is so powerful that physician James S. Gordon, director of the Center for Mind/Body Medicine in Washington, D.C., teaches it to nearly every patient he sees—from people with advanced cancer to schoolchildren struggling with attention-deficit disorder. He's taught it to refugees in war-torn Kosovo and to health professionals who have attended his workshops.

"Slow, deep breathing is probably the single best anti-stress medicine we have," says Gordon, also a clinical professor of psychiatry at the Georgetown University School of Medicine and author of *Comprehensive Cancer Care: Integrating Alternative, Complementary and Conventional Therapies*. "When you bring air down into the lower portion of the lungs, where oxygen exchange is most efficient, everything changes. Heart rate slows, blood pressure decreases, muscles relax, anxiety ceases and the mind calms."

Breathe Like a Baby. Obviously, everyone alive knows how to breathe. But Gordon and other experts in the emerging field of mind-body medicine say that few people in Western industrialized society know how to breathe correctly. We were taught to suck in our guts and puff out our chests. At the same time, we're bombarded with constant stress, which causes muscles to tense and

our respiration rate to increase. As a result, we have become a nation of shallow "chest breathers," using primarily the middle and upper portions of the lungs. Few people—other than musicians, singers and some athletes—are even aware that the abdomen should expand during inhalation.

"Watch a baby breathe," says Gordon, "and you'll see the belly go up and down, deep and slow." With age, most people shift from this healthy abdominal breathing to shallow chest breathing. This strains the lungs, which must move faster to ensure adequate oxygen flow, and taxes the heart, which is forced to speed up to provide enough blood for oxygen transport. The result is a vicious cycle, where stress prompts shallow breathing, which in turn generates additional stress.

Dr. Andrew Weil, director of the Program in Integrative Medicine and clinical professor of medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson, teaches breath work to all his patients. "I have seen breath control alone achieve remarkable results: lowering blood pressure, improving longstanding patterns of poor digestion, decreasing anxiety and allowing people to get off addictive anti-anxiety drugs, and improving sleep and energy cycles."

Unlike any other bodily function, he notes, "breathing is the only one you can do either completely consciously or unconsciously. It's con-

From the Belly!

Deep abdominal breathing, or belly breathing, helps establish a state of physiological calm and can neutralize the negative effects of stress. Here's a step-by-step lesson:

1. Lie on your back and place a book on your belly. Relax your stomach muscles and inhale deeply into your abdomen so that the book rises. When you exhale, the book should fall. You'll still be bringing air into your upper chest, but now you're also bringing air down into the lower portion of your lungs and expanding your entire chest cavity.
2. Sit up and place your right hand on your abdomen and your left hand on your chest. Breathe deeply so that your right "abdominal" hand rises and falls with your breath, while your left "chest" hand stays relatively still. Breathe in through your nose and out through your nose or mouth, and enjoy the sensation of abdominal breathing.
3. Place a clock with a second hand in view. Breathe in slowly, filling your abdomen, for five seconds. Then breathe out slowly to the same count of five. Perform deep abdominal breathing throughout the day; for example, when you awaken, before you go to sleep, and in any stressful situation.

—CAROL KRUCOFF and MITCHELL KRUCOFF, M.D.,
Healing Moves: How to Cure, Relieve and Prevent Common Ailments With Exercise (Harmony Books)

trolled by two different sets of nerves and muscles, voluntary and involuntary. And it's the only function through which the conscious mind can influence the involuntary, or autonomic, nervous system," which is responsible for revving-up the body in times of crisis.

Techniques that use breath control can be traced back to ancient India, says Weil, who learned some of the methods he uses through the study of yoga.

Super Stress-Buster. Pamela Peeke, clinical assistant professor of family medicine at the University of

Maryland School of Medicine and author of *Fight Fat After Forty*, also incorporates breath work into her practice, in part by getting patients to exercise. She often takes them out for a "walk and talk." And when she does, they tend to breathe correctly, says Peeke. "It's very hard to walk and take little shallow breaths."

In our stressed-out world, the fight-or-flight response that kept our ancestors alive has turned into a "stew and chew," says Peeke. If no physical response occurs after stress revs the body up, chronically elevated levels of stress hormones can stimulate appetite and encourage fat cells deep

inside the abdomen to store what she calls "toxic weight." Peeke also encourages yoga and tai chi, which rely on taking deep abdominal breaths.

In hospitals, breathing techniques were once taught only to women for use during childbirth. Today, some institutions are teaching breathing to patients being treated for many conditions. At Duke University Medical Center in Durham, N.C., nurse-clinician Jon Seskevich has taught abdominal breathing to most of the 18,000 patients he's worked with since 1990. About half the people he sees have cancer; the others have differing ailments, including heart disease, cystic fibrosis and various lung disorders.

One of his most dramatic cases involved a lung-cancer patient. "I walked into the room to find this large man literally fighting for breath," Seskevich recalls. "His pulse oxygen was 74, and you want it to be 90 or above. I had him sit back in his chair and place his feet on the ground. I then asked if it was okay if I touched his belly. He nodded, so I put my hand on his belly and told him to breathe softly into my hand, to let his abdomen rise into my hand."

After about six minutes of this, the man's pulse oxygen was 94 and he was breathing comfortably. "All day people were telling him to relax," says Seskevich, "and it seemed to make his struggle worse. I just told him to breathe into his belly. We didn't cure his cancer, but we may

have saved him a trip to the intensive-care unit."

On the Research Front. One of the few scientific studies to examine "belly breathing" found that menopausal women who learned the technique were able to reduce the frequency of hot flashes by about 50 percent. "The average breathing rate is about 15 to 16 cycles (inhaling and exhaling) per minute," says Robert Freedman, professor of psychiatry and behavioral neurosciences at Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit. "But with training, women can slow their breathing down to seven or eight cycles per minute."

Deep diaphragmatic breathing and other mind-body techniques can significantly reduce symptoms of severe PMS as well as depression, according to research conducted by Alice D. Domar, an assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and director of the Mind/Body Center for Women's Health.

In addition, her studies suggest that these practices can also combat infertility. After completing a mind-body program for women with infertility—in which 132 participants learned a variety of techniques including deep breathing, stress management and lifestyle changes—a surprising 42 percent of the women conceived within six months.

PHYSICIANS and other health care professionals are flocking to contin-

uing-education courses being offered by mind-body medicine experts. As graduates of these programs bring breathing techniques—and other aspects of self-care—to their practices, teaching breath work to patients may become a common part of Ameri-

can medical care. "Not only do these strategies work," says the University of Arizona's Andrew Weil, "something like breathing is a pretty cheap intervention."

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MOVING EXPERIENCES



Having moved 15 times during our 37-year marriage, my husband and I appreciate movers who take the time to carefully label boxes they pack for us. The accuracy of labels can make a huge difference when we try to find something right away.

My favorite was done by one guy who attached this sticker to a box: "Animals you hit with a stick at a Mexican party."

—Contributed by JOANNE BROCKMAN

When my husband and I moved, unpacking fell to me because he had a busy job schedule. I didn't mind the work, but I was getting tired of the countless questions about where I put things.

Exhausted, we settled into bed for our first night in our new home. At 2 a.m. I awoke to find my husband bumping into walls and furniture. "Honey, are you all right?" I asked.

"Dear," he responded, "where did you put the bathroom?"

—Contributed by DEANNA ELWOOD

CARTOON QUIPS®

Waiter to patron: "Our special is veal brochette tenderly microwaved in a delicate cellophane bag." —JOHN CALDWELL, *The Wall Street Journal*

Middle-aged wife to husband at computer: "Yes, Leroy, I think you can assume that romantic e-mail from Julia Roberts was a prank."

—BUNNY HOEST and JOHN REINER, *King Features*

Airline agent to waiting passengers: "Boarding first will be the disgruntled, followed by the hopelessly late and, finally, the just plain infuriated."

—CHARLES ALMON, *The Wall Street Journal*