Optimal Health University™

Presented by Family First Chiropractic

Breathe Your Way to Wellness

You probably don't spend a lot of time thinking about your breathing. But maybe you should start. The way you breathe can actually have a profound impact on your health.

Your doctor at Family First Chiropractic wants patients to be conscious of their breathing and to understand its effect on overall health.

So, take three deep breaths and read on …

Provides Comfort, Promotes Healing

Research reveals that rhythmic breathing facilitates comfort and healing (*Holist Nurs Pract* 2007;21:85-8).

Perform this type of breathing by inhaling through the nose, thereby expanding the chest. Exhale through the mouth while contracting the abdominal muscles.

Experts suggest counting to five — slowly — on the inhale and repeating the count on the exhale. Sometimes a bit of mental visualization helps. As you inhale, imagine that your abdomen is inflating like a balloon. "With every long, slow exhalation, you should feel more relaxed."

Sparks Stress Relief

Your doctor at Family First Chiropractic promotes stress-reduction techniques as part of the chiropractic lifestyle, a way of life that focuses on preventing disease, rather than masking symptoms with potentially hazardous medication.

Breathing exercises do wonders to quench anxiety. Simply sitting still and concentrating on slow, deep breathing for a few minutes can be extraordinarily beneficial when confronted with a stressful situation.

And research supports the anxiety-busting benefits of breathing. For instance, research shows that Sudarshan Kriya Yoga (SKY) breathing — a sequence of specific breathing techniques — is a "beneficial, low-risk, low-cost adjunct to the treatment of stress, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, stress-related medical illnesses, substance abuse, and rehabilitation of criminal offenders." (*J Altern Complement Med* 2005;11:711-7.)

Hastens Sweet Dreams

When Australian mothers remind their children to "practice your didgeridoo," they're doing more than keeping the history of this unique musical instrument alive and well. They're actually helping their children to breathe — and sleep — better!

A didgeridoo is an Aboriginal Australian wind instrument made from the branches of eucalyptus trees that have been hollowed out by termites. "Playing is an effective treatment alternative well-accepted by patients with moderate obstructive sleep apnea syndrome," note researchers (*Br Med J* 2006;332:266).

It seems that the breathing techniques encouraged by learning to play the didgeridoo, and other wind instruments, ward off sleep-related breathing problems.

Decreases Reaction Time

Breathing exercises may make you think faster, say scientists.

Specifically, purposeful breathing affects a measure of cognitive ability known as reaction time (RT).

For instance, in a study of 22 healthy schoolboys, Mukh bhastrika — a yoga technique in which breath is actively blasted out in "whooshes" following a deep inhalation — cut reaction time significantly.

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"A decrease in RT indicates an improved sensory-motor performance and enhanced processing ability of [the] central nervous system. This may be due to greater arousal, faster rate of information processing, improved concentration and/or an ability to ignore extraneous stimuli." (*Indian J Physiol Pharmacol* 2003;47:297-300.)

This is especially beneficial, noted researchers, in situations requiring quick reactivity, such as sports, machine operation and race-car driving.

Boosts Brain Power

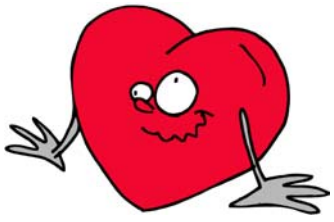
Just 30 minutes of unilateral [one side at a time] forced nostril breathing (UFNB) — a yoga breathing technique called "breath of fire" or "kapalabhatti" — can boost cognitive performance. It employs a "very shallow but rapid breath in which the abdominal region acts like a bellows." (*Int J Neurosci* 1993;73:47-60.)

In a study involving 51 undergraduate psychology students, "spatial task performance was significantly enhanced during left nostril breathing in both males and females," noted researchers (*Int J Neurosci* 1993;73:61-8).

Hastens Heart Health

Research also suggests that breathing exercises improve cardiovascular health.

In one analysis, breathing exercises in seven volunteers (four males, three



females) demonstrated a unique "effect on sympathetic stimulation of the heart that may have therapeutic value." (*Int J Neurosci* 1993;73:47-60.)

Aids Antioxidants

Antioxidants are powerful disease-fighting chemicals abundant in some foods.

Breathing exercises improve the antioxidant status in an individual's blood, say scientists.

"An improvement in the antioxidant status is helpful in preventing many pathological processes that are known [linked] with impaired antioxidant system of body." (*Indian J Physiol Pharmacol* 2002;46:349-54.)

Improves COPD Symptoms

For those with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), shortness of breath is a frightening reality. Inhalers and other medications are often the first line of defense. But these medications may have hazardous side effects.

The good news is that countless studies show that breathing exercises assist relaxation, decrease anxiety and strengthen the lungs.

One example is pursed-lip breathing, which involves exhaling through the mouth while the lips — except for a small space in the center, similar to the position held when inflating a balloon — are held together. "Exhalation should be at least twice as long as inhalation and should be a steady stream of air without blowing too hard. Inhalation should be through the nose and not too deep." (*MedSurg Nursing* 2000;9.4:178.)

Acts Like a Mini-Workout

Pursed-lip breathing also offers patients an inner-body workout! In addition to decreasing respiratory rate, research illustrates that this technique:

- Stimulates rib-cage muscles.
- Improves oxygen saturation.
- Reduces diaphragm fatigue.

This unique breathing method is also associated with increased exercise performance through expanded lung capacity and enhanced functioning (*MedSurg Nursing* 2000;9.4:178).

Lessens Swelling

Breathing purposefully may even prevent excessive swelling.

For instance, one study examined women with secondary lymphedema — when surgery causes the body's lymph fluid to become stagnate, resulting in swelling of the lower legs or arms.

After undergoing surgical intervention for breast cancer, 38 women with lymphedema participated in 10 minutes of standardized arm exercises and deep breathing. Researchers measured the patients every 10 minutes for one hour, then 24 hours and one week post-regime. A smaller cohort of 24 women continued the 10-minute exercise regime each morning and evening for one month.

All 59 women were found to have a "statistically significant" reduction in arm volume, along with heaviness and tightness. "The reduction in heaviness was sustained at 24 hours, one week, and even one month after the program. Perceived limb size was significantly reduced at one week and at the one month follow-up." (*Lymphology* 2005;38:136-45.)

Problems Breathing?

If you experience periodic breathing problems, phone our office to schedule a full physical examination. Instigators include misalignment of spinal bones (vertebrae), a condition known as ***vertebral subluxation***; allergies; respiratory disease; obesity; anxiety and circulation disorders.

If you experience extreme shortness of breath or extreme pain related to inhaling or exhaling, go to a hospital emergency room immediately. This could be a symptom of heart attack, collapsed lung or other serious condition.

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