CORE HEALTH
NATUROPATHIC WELLNESS CENTER
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Breathe using your diaphragm

Diaphragmatic breathing is the healthiest form of breathing. It is also the most natural - observe how a very young baby breathes. They will use their diaphragm and full torso for each breath.
By utilizing your diaphragm you activate your natural means of emptying and re-filling your lungs effectively.

Re-learn to use your diaphragm

Imagine that your chest is a somewhat conical cavity with the lungs lightly attached to the inside. And with the floor of the cone being made up of a large muscle called the diaphragm. It's the movements of the wall **and** the floor of this cone that result in the movement of air into and out of your body.
Being more like sponges than muscles your lungs cannot get rid of the stale air on their own. For this they must rely on the contraction of the `cone' which surrounds them - in particular the floor of that cone - the diaphragm. This is why using your abdominal or stomach muscles in breathing, which indirectly activates your diaphragm, ensures a better supply of refreshing oxygen.
If you use mainly the top of the cone it's called upper-chest breathing. If you mainly engage the lower walls and floor of the cone it is called diaphragmatic breathing.

To check how you are breathing

> Rest one hand on your upper chest and the other over your navel area.
> Notice which hand rises first when you inhale.
> If the upper hand rises first you are using upper chest breathing. If the lower hand rises first you are breathing with your diaphragm. If both move at the same time you are using a mix of both.

Upper-Chest Breathing

This is not wrong but it does mean that your breathing will be a lot more rapid than if you were using your diaphragm. This is because the amount you can inhale and exhale is considerably less - because the upper ribcage does not have the ability to expand and contract as well as the combination of lower ribcage and diaphragm 'floor' - diaphragmatic breathing.

Using your Diaphragm

Diaphragmatic breathing, particularly if combined with mid- and upper-chest breathing, is much slower and more calming that upper-chest breathing alone.
An added bonus to diaphragm breathing is that it gives a wonderful massage to your internal organs such as the heart, liver, and digestive organs (including colon) keeping them toned and ensuring they get a healthy blood supply.
Most better-breathing techniques rely on your ability to breathe using your diaphragm. So if you have habitually used the mid- or upper-chest it is worthwhile to first develop your ability to use your diaphragm. That way, if you need to use a special technique you will have the diaphragm-breathing skill ready.

Practice using your diaphragm

Spend a few minutes a couple of times a day practicing using your diaphragm:
1. Lie flat on the floor. Raise your knees. (You can put a cushion under them if you wish.)
2. Put one palm on your upper chest and the other over your navel. (Your objective is to have the lower hand rise *first* when you breathe in.)
3. Breathe out fully - and then a little bit more. With practice you will find you can do this by drawing in your abdomen. Pause for 2-4 seconds.
4. Allow the air to naturally flow in again.
Slowly and calmly repeat this cycle a few times.