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Breathing Exercises

From Dr. Robert Fulford, D.O.

Dr. Andrew Weil, in his book *Spontaneous Healing* writes, "If breath is the movement of spirit in the body, then working with the breath is a form of spiritual practice. It is also one that impacts health and healing, because how we breathe both reflects the state of the nervous system and influences the state of the nervous system."

1. "Regenerative Breathing" or the "Piston Breath."

Sitting comfortably in a chair, breathe in and out rapidly through the nostrils, imitating the motion of an automobile piston going in and out. Dr. Fulford wrote, "I usually ask patients to start with ten piston breaths, because that's all that many can do comfortably. When that becomes easy, we increase the number to twenty, and when twenty becomes easy, we go to forty, and then eventually one hundred. If you can, repeat another hundred. This exercise may sound simple, but you might be surprised at how many people can't do it well. If you didn't get that full, first breath at childbirth, it will take you more time than you think to build up to a hundred. By performing the piston-breathing exercise, you should be able to regenerate every cell in your body—in other words, you can bring stagnated cells that haven't been functioning well back into normal activity."

2. Stand with your feet spread a shoulder-width apart and extend your arms out to your sides, approximately at shoulder height. Your left palm should face upward, and your right should face downward. (Holding the left palm face up torques the body, helping to stretch the fascia.)

Make sure that you take full, deep breaths. If you can, try to stand in this position for a full ten minutes. When you get to the point where you're too tired to hold your arms up any longer, still keeping them straight, slowly raise them above your head, without allowing them to come forward. Then, lower them to your sides. Because many patients find this exercise too demanding, Dr. Fulford devised a variation: sit on a couch and place your arms along the back, also with your left palm up and right palm down, and sit still for fifteen minutes. If you're doing this correctly, you should soon start to feel the tissues in the shoulders opening up, allowing your respiration to expand.

3. For the next exercise, you must lie down on the floor and stretch out your arms, with the left palm facing up and the right palm facing down, as in the first exercise. Then, without trying to bring the knee or the foot up to the head, swing one leg over to the opposite side of your body, crossing leg over leg. Let the leg come to rest where it wants. Simply position it where you're comfortable, and then lie still for five minutes. When the time is up, repeat with opposite leg.

This exercise stretches the muscles in the pelvis and is particularly useful for women who've just given birth, or for anyone whose back has been aching.

4. Sit in an upright chair with your thighs parallel to the floor and the lower part of your leg perpendicular to the floor. Bend over, placing your elbows on the inside of your knees and your hands between your feet; turn your palms away from each other, tuck your fingers under the arch of each foot and your thumb over the top of the foot. Let your spine fully stretch in this position. Breathe slowly and fully for five minutes. Do this once a day and you'll notice that walking is much easier, you can stand up straighter, and your back feels lighter.

5. Stand against a wall so that your heels, lower back, shoulder blades, and the back of your head touch the wall. Then, raise your arms straight out in front of you, letting your thumbs touch each other. As slowly as possible, raise your arms straight above your head until you finally touch the wall. Then, lower your arms out and down to your sides. Again, remember to breathe slowly and fully. Do this two times, once a day. This exercise helps pull the rib cage into its normal position, frees up the diaphragm, and stretches the muscles all the way from the pelvis to the root of the skull.

6. These shoulder rolls were developed for office workers stuck at a computer desk all day.

Sit in a chair with your back straight and both feet on the floor. Next, bend your elbows in front of you and let your fingertips rest on the tops of your shoulders. Breathing slowly and fully, as always, on the inhalation lift your elbows toward the ceiling and lower your head. Then, on the exhalation, roll the elbows out to the side and back to the starting position while lifting your head back. This stretches the head and breaks up the tension pattern. Try this five times, two to three times a day.

