Take a Deep Breath!

Why Shallow Breathing Can Hurt You, But Deep Breathing Can Save Your Life.

By Donna Crow

Let's talk about breathing. Of course we all know that without it we would die in short order. We know we need to breathe to stay alive. Unfortunately, what most people don't know is that deep breathing can optimize health, while shallow breathing can lead to a multitude of ills.

Studies show that many Americans use as little as 25% of their lung capacity and almost all are shallow breathers.

Why is shallow breathing a problem?

1. It reduces the amount of oxygen in our bloodstream, which reduces the amount available to our cells throughout the body which has a multitude of negative effects.

2. It slows down the movement of the lymphatic system.

Why do we want to move the lymphatic system?

To answer that, we need to know what the lymphatic system is. Simply put, it looks very much like the cardio-vascular system with arteries, veins, and capillaries. It contains approximately three times as much fluid as the blood stream. The big difference is that there is no pump (heart) to automatically move all that lymphatic fluid; instead, it uses a pump-less vacuum system.

So where does all this lymph fluid come from, and what is its purpose?

Our blood vessels are porous and they leak fluid from the bloodstream into our tissues. This fluid is filled with oxygen and nutrients that feed our cells. When it is in the bloodstream carrying blood cells, this fluid is called "plasma." When it has left the bloodstream and is in the interstitial spaces (the space between our cells), it is called "lymph."

Once this life filled fluid is in our interstitial spaces (the spaces between our cells) and has deposited its nutrients and oxygen it is unable return to the blood stream. It stays in the tissues and without the lymphatic system to pick it up and return it to the blood stream we would drown and become dehydrated at the same time. We would end up with too much fluid in our tissues and not enough fluid in our blood stream, and within 24 hours we would be dead.

How does the lymphatic system move this fluid?

Lymph capillaries in the tissues have little suction openings that pick up this fluid. The lymphatic system moves this fluid toward the torso to the thoracic duct, which is about as big around as your thumb, and runs up the center of the body like a tree trunk. Most of your lymphatic vessels dump into this duct, and from this duct lymph is delivered back into the bloodstream at the sub-clavian duct.

Your lymphatic system is also a cleansing system filled with immune cells. Ideally, by the time the lymphatic fluid has reached the thoracic duct, it has gone through an efficient cleansing process to remove toxins, pathogens, and cellular debris.

So, how does this cleansed lymphatic fluid move upward in the body—fighting gravity—to get to the thoracic duct and ultimately back into the bloodstream? Well, as I said earlier, it involves a vacuum system. As fluid leaves this thoracic duct and spills back into the bloodstream, it causes a vacuum effect that pulls fluid up from the lower extremities, similar to sucking liquid from a straw in a drinking glass.

Diagram of a small segment of a lymph vessel.

Notice the check valves that allow fluid to move upward on each deep breath. As you exhale the valves close; preventing the lymphatic fluid from settling down in the lower extremities.

The arrow indicates the direction of lymph flow - toward the heart - as we inhale.

For many years, it was believed that during physical exercise, our muscles massaged the lymph vessels and moved lymph up the body. However, it was proven in the seventies that this is not the chief way that lymph moves.

At the International Lymphatic Society, a volunteer had a tiny camera placed in his thoracic duct where it met the sub-clavian duct (near the clavicle), where the lymph returns to the bloodstream. He was then put on a treadmill and began to walk. While he was walking, Lymphologists viewed feed from the camera on a big screen, which showed very little lymphatic fluid moving as the volunteer walked on the treadmill.

Next, he was instructed to step off of the treadmill and take a few deep breaths. The Lymphologists were amazed to see the lymph fluid rush like a geyser from the thoracic duct into the sub-clavian duct and into the bloodstream. What they observed was a huge departure from their prior way of thinking. They clearly saw that:

Deep breathing, not physical movement, powerfully moves the lymphatic system!

That movement of fluid, from the thoracic duct back into the bloodstream, causes a vacuum in the vessels of the lymphatic system. As the vacuum is

created and the fluid is pulled upward, little check valves in the vessels are forced open, allowing the fluid to move up the extremities. When the vacuum stops, the restored pressure causes the valves to close, which keeps the lymph from running back down through the lymph vessels and settling in the lower extremities. In this way, the nutrient and oxygen-dense fluid cycles from the bloodstream to the tissues, where the lymphatic system picks it up, cleans it, and returns it to the bloodstream.

So, what happens when we have sedentary lives with little physical activity? We don't breathe deeply and our lymphatic system slows down. And when our lymphatic system slows down, our tissues have too much fluid in them. And when our tissues have too much fluid in them, they get less oxygen. It is similar to over-watering a plant. Oxygen levels are reduced, and as a result, so are nutrients and health. The same happens with people. Your cells get less oxygen, fewer nutrients, and less glucose. Studies show that shallow breathing easily results is a 75% decrease in nutrient uptake.

In addition the toxin levels rise, and the body moves toward an acid condition, all of which can lead to poor health.. The extreme version of this can lead to death.

I remember a childhood story I heard back in the fifties or sixties about Native Americans who, during that era, were referred to as "Indians." It was said that when an Indian was old and knew it was their time to die, they would go and sit under a tree or in their tee-pee and practice extremely shallow breathing, with the result that within a few days they would be dead. Why? Because extremely shallow breathing shuts down the lymphatic movement, the lymph builds up in the tissues, and the cells drown in fluid and toxins, ending in death.

Of course, that is the extreme version of shallow breathing and most people are not in danger of immediately perishing, however, most of us are not moving enough lymphatic fluid to be truly healthy either, and the malfunctions from this can be vast and varied. Cancer, for instance, can be a low-oxygen malfunction of the body.

When cells live in a chronically low oxygen environment, they don't immediately die. They have a powerful survival mechanism and, determined to live, they turn to fermentation to survive. Fermentation requires less oxygen and enables the cell to stay alive. Good for the cell, but not good for the body as a fermenting cell is a cancer cell. The good news is that microscopic studies show that a fermenting (cancer) cell will turn back into a healthy respirating cell when supplied with adequate oxygen. The bad news is that if

there is too much fluid around the cells (because the lymphatic system is not moving quickly enough), then enough oxygen can't get through.

In what other ways can a sluggish lymphatic system affect us?

Have you ever awakened with puffy eyes? This is a good indication of a sluggish lymphatic system. While you sleep, your breathing becomes very shallow and the whole lymphatic process slows down. What about those morning aches and pains that go away whenever you get up and get moving? They leave because you begin to move the lymphatic fluid. For some people, a sluggish lymphatic system can result in a much more serious issue, such as arthritis.

All of the following conditions have shown consistent improvement following increased lymph movement:

1. Back pain
2. Breast congestion
3. Chronic bowel problems such as; constipation
4. Yeast infections
5. Chronic fatigue syndrome
6. Fibromyalgia
7. Skin disorders
8. Cellulite fat accumulations
9. Rheumatoid arthritis
10. Hormonal and emotional imbalances
11. Recurrent headaches
12. Chronic depression
13. Muscle and tissue tension
14. Chronic sinusitis, allergies
15. Gum disease and bad breath
16. Hearing, balance, or sight problems
17. Recurrent tonsillitis, colds
18. Prostatitis
19. Overweight
20. Lupus
21. Hemorrhoids
22. Slow healing of burns and cuts
23. Chronic pain and more.

Many people have relieved themselves of serious illnesses by simple deep breathing.

One such individual is Rashelle Haines, who is the sister-in-law of Greer Childers, an outspoken advocate of deep breathing exercises. As a child, Rashelle was diagnosed with a terminal illness. She was told that her life would never be normal and that she would always be limited. She refused to accept these opinions. At the age of 19 she began a quest to find a way to become healthy.

She started working out in the gym and after years of grueling work she looked good, and was a spokes model for several

companies, yet still felt sick most of the time.

It wasn't until she started doing aerobic breathing in 1980 that her serious health issues were eliminated and she felt healthy and full of energy. She is now in her sixties and she feels blessed to be a vigorous, healthy woman.

This is her web site.
http://www.lifelift.com/lifelift_lobby.htm

Her story is one that would be acknowledged as a "best case scenario." If you have a serious illness, deep breathing might not cure you; but if you have a serious illness and are not doing deep breathing as a part of your protocol, you are missing a vital link.

Even if you do not have a serious illness, you might consider adding deep breathing to your day as a preventative measure.

It can be as simple as this:

1. Breathe in through the nose, slowly and deeply, expanding the abdomen, to the count of four.

(1 – 2 – 3 – 4)

2. Hold for a count of four.

(1 – 2 – 3 – 4)

3. Breathe out through the nose or mouth, pulling your stomach in to fully empty your lungs, to the count of four.

(1 – 2 – 3 – 4)

4. Hold for a count of four.

(1 – 2 – 3 – 4)

5. Repeat the whole process.

Do this for 15 to 20 minutes a day, and you will be surprised at your increased energy and endurance; both mentally and physically. It beats a cup of coffee any day. My experience is that it increases my energy for a good 24 hours. In addition it lifts the mood, and awakens the brain. Unless you do it, it is difficult to imagine how 10-15 or 20 minutes of relaxed, rhythmic deep breathing could so change the quality of an entire day.

You get an immediate short-term payoff, but you also give your body what it needs to do major repairs. Who knows what hidden problems might be alleviated and never become a life-threatening issue?

The trick is to do it!

I don't know why, but in the beginning, most people do not like to do deep breathing. I guess breathing is such a natural process that forcing it to work differently seems laborious. What we need to understand is that we are probably under-breathing most of the time. What seems normal to us is actually sub-par.

When you choose to breathe deeper for a short time each day over the course of a week or so, it will cause you to

"naturally" breathe deeper for the rest of the day and will expand your lung capacity. Your "normal" subconscious breath will become a better quality breath, and you will find that breathing deeply begins to be quite pleasurable and energizing. Once you have practiced it for a week or so, it can even become addictive!

A fun way to pace your breathing is to go to the below site and download the free breathing program called E-Z Air.

http://www.mindgrowth.com/store/ezair.htm

This program helps you pace your breathing. It is very simple to download and fun to use. It looks like this.

On the Web site, it says:

E-Z Air™ is a software program published by the BFE to help you breathe better when sitting at your computer.

EZ-Air allows you to place a thin bar graph anywhere on your screen to help you pace your inhalation and exhalation.

EZ-Air provides options for sound, customized images, autostart, etc.

EZ-Air can be used with any other software to add breath pacing to the program (for example, the BioGraph Infiniti software from Thought Technology Ltd).

Best of all, EZ-Air is free.

Breathing is fun!

Another option is to do something fun that will automatically cause deep breathing, such as rebounding, sports, or even brisk walking while pumping the arms. Make it fun and you are more likely to continue with it.

If you are over 50, it can be better to exhale more than you inhale when you first start your deep breathing exercise. Long story there, but as we get older we basically build up carbon dioxide in our system which can reduce our energy levels. Exhaling rids our body of carbon dioxide. A fun breath to do to take advantage of this is what is called a "Choo-Choo train" breath. It's all mouth breathing, no nose breathing.

With pursed lips take:

A brisk forceful breath in

A brisk forceful breath out

A brisk forceful breath in

A brisk forceful breath out

A brisk forceful breath in

A brisk forceful breath out

A brisk forceful breath out

A brisk forceful breath out

So it's: in/out, in/out, in/out, out, out.

Do quick in and out breaths that make a Choo-Choo sound. I like to do this while gently rebounding.

This whole process should not take more than 3 or 4 seconds. Watch the clock. Of course you can repeat this many times in one session. Just two minutes of this is very refreshing.

Those three OUT breaths at the end help expel excess carbon dioxide. You can do it while walking and pump your arms like the arms that move the wheels on an old train. This can increase the lighthearted pleasure of the event, which in turn will increase the likelihood of gaining the benefits. (As an alternative, breathe briskly in through the nose and out through the mouth.)

Can anyone say *Easy Weight Loss?*

Yes, the daily practice of deep rhythmic breathing from the abdomen often results in weight loss. Why? Because it turns on our metabolism. Oxygen is essential to body energy levels and when you increase your oxygen you increase your bodies ability to burn fuel. The result can be weight loss. There just is no easier way to up the metabolism and see healthy weight loss.

Okay, so *now* you are finally interested, right? Feeling good didn't inspire you, recovering from illness didn't do it, but the hope of easy weight loss woke you up and now you are breathing deep. Chuckle. Well, whatever it takes. I'm just glad you are inspired, but be careful. Desperation to lose weight can make you overuse deep breathing and cause you to develop unhealthy breathing. Gentle rhythmic breathing for one session no longer than 20 minutes once a day is okay. Don't over do this.

Stress Reduction!

What actually happens when we feel stress? Well, the sympathetic nervous system gets activated. This tells the body to produce cortisol and adrenaline. If you are needing hyper alertness to avoid being hit by a car when crossing the street then its a good system to have in place.

But chronic levels of these hormones uses up vital nutrients, disrupts normal brain function, interferes with digestion, imbalances your endocrine system, increases pain, tightens muscles, whacks out your blood sugar levels, causes fatigue and depression and more.

The parasympathetic nervous system is what shuts off this sympathetic nervous system response. And guess what activates the parasympathetic nervous system? You guessed right! Relaxed, deep belly-breathing.

Relaxed, deep belly-breathing naturally and effectively turns on the relaxation response in the body and turns off the stress response and it does it in just

seconds—for free!

Ed McCabe ("Mr. Oxygen") has written a book titled, Flood Your Body with Oxygen. It is a wonderful self-help book, full of excellent methods and means of increasing oxygen levels in the body with the intent of reversing disease and restoring health. I found it noteworthy that Ed says that they have done Oxymeter readings on people, before and after every oxygen protocol, and they have found that nothing raises blood oxygen levels faster or higher than a simple, abdomen-expanding, deep breath. Learn more about Ed's work at: **http://www.oxygenhealth.com/index2.html**

Well I hope I have inspired you and I hope that before you leave this site, and go about your business, that you will do a session of deep breathing. Right now? Yes, right now! If you don't it is likely that you will forget that you ever read this article and will let this powerful, free health secret slip away.

I would also like to challenge you to make a commitment to do a session of deep breathing daily for one week. A good way to remind yourself to do this is to turn a kitchen chair upside down in the living room, and leave it there. Every time you see it, it will remind you of your commitment. Leave it there for the week, until you get the habit started. Trust me, you won't regret it. Some of you reading just might save your own life.

If you have serious health issues, please consult your physician before embarking on any new health program.

To Your Health!

Donna Crow

http://www.donnacrow.com

Certificate in Lymphology

Basic and Advanced Practitioner of EFT

Master of G-Jo Acupressure

Holistic Health Practitioner

To learn other ways to oxygenate the body with natural products like Homozon or Vitamin O, or to learn about other remarkable natural healers check out these links:

http://www.theoriginalhomozon.com

http://www.donnacrow.com

http://www.excellentthings.com

http://www.excellentthings.net

http://www.goodhealth.nu/us/1387/

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