

Good Posture = Good Breathing

✦ During a recent grocery-shopping spree, I ran into an old colleague, a scientist, who suddenly opened his right hand to expose a big “b” on his palm. I looked at the letter, then at him. “‘B’ is for breathing,” he informed me. “It’s there as a reminder to breathe consciously, fully and deeply.” We enjoyed a hearty laugh together and went on our separate ways.

How you breathe, whether shallowly or deeply, makes a huge difference in how you feel, how you focus, how you respond to everyday situations and challenges, and how you are able to focus. Breathing literally keeps you alive. It also helps you in controlling and modulating your voice when you speak.

Think back for a moment on your Ice Breaker speech, or any other speech in which you had a heavy emotional involvement. Add to that

the audience as an unknown to you, and chances are that you started to feel nervous, alarmed and even panicked. Your heart beat faster, you had a dry mouth and your breath became shallow and fast. To compensate for all this, you conquered your initial shock by speaking faster, in an effort to get back to your seat as quickly as possible.

Now, imagine for a moment that you began your day becoming aware of your breath, then went to your Toastmasters meeting with a full awareness, and began your speech with a gentle and thorough exhalation that eased you into the cycle of your breath and the flow of your speech. By doing so you used your breathing to slow down, simplify and deliver.

While most of us take breathing for granted, conscious breathing benefits

us greatly. Begin by simply paying attention to your breath. Become aware of your normal breathing patterns. Note when you tend to hold your breath. Know also that breathing is an integral component of relaxation.

Let’s briefly touch on what happens when you breathe incorrectly. Perhaps you tend to slump either when sitting or walking. Your posture may not be conducive to correct breathing. Or perhaps you suffer from the “shallow breather” syndrome. In either case, you are bringing oxygen only into your upper lungs. When this happens, your breath rate increases, but ironically your body goes through a complex physiological response whose net effect is an actual oxygen shortage!

This situation clearly isn’t advantageous. It affects the muscles, the nervous system and the mind. In order to allow your respiratory system to work for you rather than against you, follow the exercises in the chart on this page.

Correct breathing tones the vocal cords and positively affects the tone and timber of your voice. Good posture and good breathing are intimately related. As you are breathing better, your body tends to straighten up and to convey a confident demeanor. Remember that good posture and good breathing are habits. Habits form over time through repetitions. Pay attention to these tips, apply them right now and all through the day. Your life and its quality depend on your breath! **■**

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Tip	Benefits
Check your posture.	Allows your spine to rise and your chest to open.
Relax your head, neck and shoulders.	Taking tension away helps the breath to flow more freely.
Breathe through your nose, not through your mouth.	Filters, warms and moisturizes the air you breathe in. You don’t eat through your nose, so don’t breathe through your mouth.
Inhale fully as though you were filling a glass with water and letting it spill over the sides.	The oxygen can penetrate deeply into your lungs, not just the upper lungs.
Exhale completely – let the outflow expand in a large wave.	Increases the capacity to inhale fresh, new air to release toxins, blockages and tensions.
Observe how you breathe. Is your breath jerky or smooth? It can tell you how you feel.	All else will follow naturally, almost effortlessly.