

In an excellent article (The Five Healing Benefits of Breath), the author reminds us about the importance of breathing fully, slowly and steadily. The article describes some of the benefits of healthy breathing as calming the mind, cleaning toxins and reducing pain in the body. Most people take breathing for granted. Usually we do not give it much thought. Breathing, however is the most significant activity that we do because it gives us the most important “nutrient” required for life: oxygen.

If you ask people what is the most indispensable ingredient for abundant health, you will seldom receive the right answer. The most common answers are plenty of water or nutritious food. Both of those are important, but not nearly as powerful as oxygen. Think about it. People can live thirty days with no food and still will not die. People can live five days with no water and still be alive. However, five minutes with no oxygen usually causes death. Aside from keeping us alive, why is oxygen so valuable? Low levels of oxygen are associated with all sorts of chronic diseases. Oxygen helps to clean the blood of bacteria and viruses. Oxygen gives you more energy and boosts the immune system. Oxygen can help with memory loss, depression and muscle ache and pains. Higher levels of oxygen are usually accompanied by better overall health.

Oxygen levels play a significant role in the way we feel day to day. These levels vary in each person depending on their breathing patterns and the amount of oxygen in the environment. Most people do not get enough oxygen. This is mainly due to the fact that we breathe very shallow. By that, I mean we are using only a small part of our lungs. This is what is referred to as chest breathing. Proper breathing by using all of the lungs starts with the abdomen area filling up with air and then the chest. Most people just fill up the chest which is about a third of lung capacity. This will keep you alive but does not provide enough oxygen for optimal health.

Another reason that we do not get enough oxygen is because there is not as much as there once was in the air we breathe. When scientists measured the percentage of oxygen in the air in a pristine environment such as in a country setting with lots of trees and very few cars the measurement of oxygen was in the mid 20 % range. When they measured the oxygen content in an air sample from a big city with few trees and many cars the oxygen percentage was in the mid teens. Oxygen samples from inside buildings were even worse. It could be as low as 10%. What is even more eye opening is that when scientists took ice samples from 3,000 years ago and measured the oxygen content of the air bubbles they found that it was about 40%. As we continue to cut down trees and pollute the air, we are slowly depriving ourselves of the most vital nutrient on the planet.

80% of all the pain people experience in their life is muscular pain caused by muscle imbalances. The reason that not every tight muscle causes pain has to do with the oxygen the tissues are receiving. When tissues do not get enough oxygen they hurt a lot more than tissue that is getting enough oxygen. So even if you have a tight muscle but your are getting a lot of oxygen, the oxygen will reduce or eliminate the pain.

The easiest way to get more oxygen is to develop a daily practice of deep, slow breathing. This is easy to do and has many benefits such as reduced pain levels, clearer thinking, more energy, reduced blood pressure and reduced stress levels to name a few. Do the following exercise at least twice a day for 10-15 minutes and for shorter durations during the day. It may take some practice to break the habit of chest breathing,, but it is well worth the effort.

Daily Practice:

Sit up straight or lie on your back.

Place a hand on your abdomen and slowly inhale through your nose.

As you inhale, make sure that you feel your abdomen expanding against your hand.
After your abdomen is full, continue to inhale so now you feel your chest expanding. This should all be done with no effort or straining.
Slowly exhale through your nose or mouth. Repeat the process.