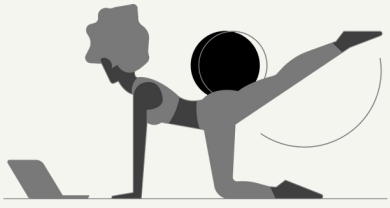
HOW TO USE YOUR BREATH EFFECTIVELY

Breathing properly can decrease stress and muscle tension; calm your nerves; sharpen your focus; minimize negative and distracting thoughts; reduce fatigue; and promote stamina. Unfortunately, proper breathing is often an overlooked component of fitness.



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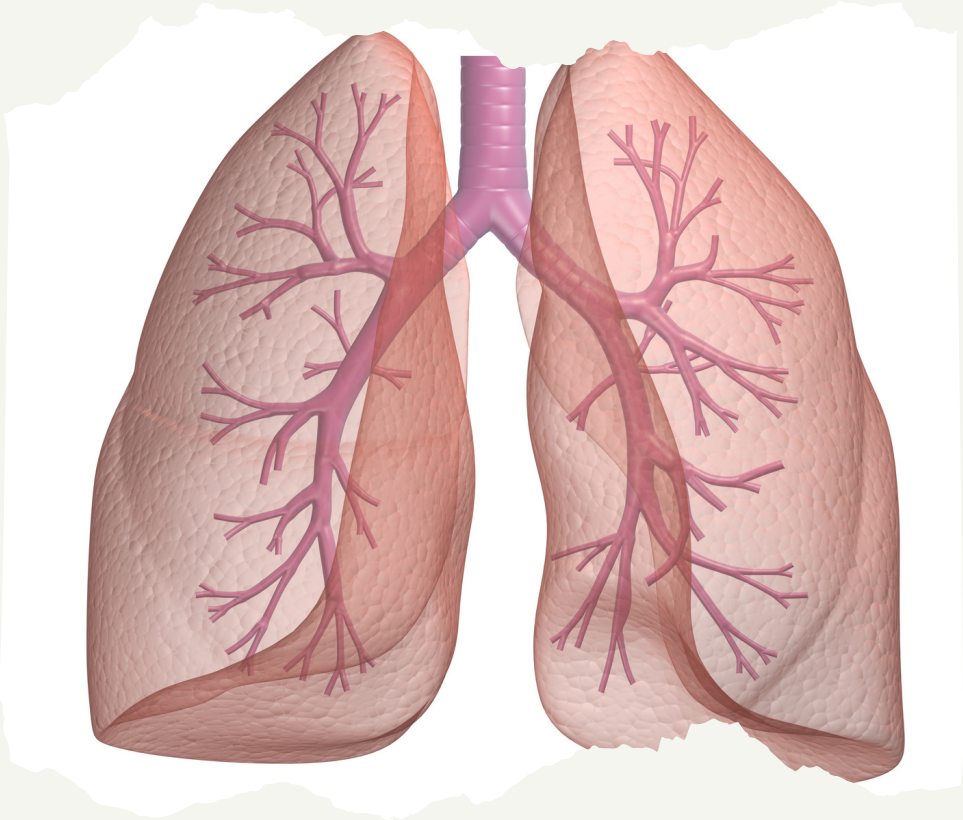
FOR BETTER BACK AND SPINE HEALTH



IF IT SOUNDS SIMPLE..... AFTER ALL, BREATHING IS SOMETHING YOU ARE BORN KNOWING HOW TO DO, AND YOUR BODY TYPICALLY DOES IT ON AUTOPILOT. BUT THERE ARE DIFFERENT WAYS TO BREATHE, WHICH CAN BE ADJUSTED DEPENDING ON A VARIETY OF CONDITIONS, AND THE RESPIRATORY PROCESS THAT GOES ON INSIDE YOUR BODY TO REGULATE EVERY SINGLE BREATH IS SERIOUSLY COMPLEX.

BUT HOW DO YOU USE YOUR BREATH TO YOUR ADVANTAGE—BOTH IN EVERYDAY LIFE, AND ESPECIALLY IN EXERCISE? HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR BREATH AND HOW IT CAN IMPACT YOUR PILATES WORKOUT!

WHAT DOES PROPER BREATHING MEAN?

WHETHER YOU'RE EXERCISING OR AT REST, IT'S BEST TO USE A METHOD CALLED "DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING".

YOUR DIAPHRAGM IS A MUSCLE LOCATED BETWEEN YOUR THORACIC CAVITY (CHEST) AND ABDOMINAL CAVITY, AND IT SHOULD BE THE MAIN WORKHORSE THAT POWERS YOUR BREATHING, WHETHER YOU'RE EXERCISING OR NOT. YET MANY OF US DON'T FULLY ENGAGE THIS MUSCLE WHEN BREATHING, AND INSTEAD TAKE SHORTER, MORE SHALLOW BREATHS THAT BEGIN AND END IN THE CHEST.

BREATHING IN THIS SHALLOW WAY, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO DELIVER AS MUCH OXYGENATED AIR TO YOUR LUNGS. THIS INCREASES YOUR HEART RATE AND BLOOD PRESSURE, WHICH CAN ULTIMATELY INCREASE FEELINGS OF ANXIETY AND STRESS, AND EVEN MAKE YOU FEEL SHORT OF BREATH.

DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS YOUR BEST BET FOR EFFICIENT, EFFECTIVE BREATHING.

THIS SPECIFIC TYPE OF BREATHING, WHICH ENGAGES THE DIAPHRAGM MUSCLE WITH EVERY BREATH, INVOLVES SLOWLY BREATHING IN THROUGH THE NOSE, FILLING UP YOUR LOWER RIB CAGE (VERSUS YOUR CHEST) WITH AIR, AND THEN SLOWLY EXHALING OUT THROUGH THE MOUTH AS THE STOMACH COLLAPSES DOWN AND IN.

WHEN DOING PILATES, DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING WILL HELP ENSURE CORE ACTIVATION AND THAT YOU'RE BREATHING DEEPLY ENOUGH TO DELIVER ENOUGH OXYGEN TO THE MUSCLES, WHICH PREVENTS THEM FROM FATIGUING EARLY.

DRIVING YOUR BREATH FROM THE DIAPHRAGM CAN ALSO HELP YOU AVOID THOSE DREADED MID-WORKOUT SIDE STITCHES, OR ABDOMINAL CRAMPS, WHICH ARE TYPICALLY THE RESULT OF "USING THE WRONG MUSCLES TO DRIVE RESPIRATION.

BREATHING, THOUGH SECOND-NATURE FOR ALL OF US, IS STILL AN ACTIVE PROCESS, MEANING THAT IT DOES REQUIRE STRENGTH AND EFFORT FOR YOUR BODY TO PERFORM CORRECTLY. AND TOGETHER, THE BREATH IMPACTS THE MECHANICS OF YOUR BODY.

EVERY INHALE AND EXHALE CHANGES THE VOLUME OF OUR LUNGS AND THERBY CHANGES OUR POSTURE, WHICH CHANGES THE POSITION OF THE THORACIC SPINE, THE RIBS, THE PELVIS, THE SHOULDERS, AND THE INTRA-ABDOMINAL PRESSURE. FOR THAT REASON, THE WAY YOU BREATHE CAN IMPACT HOW HARD OR EASY IT IS TO GET THROUGH A WORKOUT.

MOST IMPORTANTLY TO OUR NEEDS IN THIS CLASS, BREATHING CAN HELP CREATE CORE PRESSURE THAT STABILIZES YOUR SPINE, WHICH HELPS YOU LIFT THE WEIGHT OF YOUR OWN BODY.

BREATHING OUT ON THE WORK PHASE OF A MOVEMENT AND BREATHING IN ON REST PHASE IS THE MOST COMMONLY RECOMMENDED TECHNIQUE.

THIS IS BECAUSE WHEN YOU EXHALE AND SQUEEZE THE AIR OUT, YOU INCREASE CORE ENGAGEMENT. IN PILATES, A TIGHT CORE EQUALS MORE POWER AND MORE STABILITY—AND YOU WANT TO HAVE THAT EXTRA HELP ON THE MOST CHALLENGING PARTS OF YOUR WORKOUT.