Correcting Dysfunctional Breathing Patterns
All from The Breathing Book by Donna Farhi

Reverse Breathing

Description
• The belly moves in on the inhale and out on the exhale.
• The pelvic floor closes on inhale and opens on exhale.

Cause
• May be from the habit of wearing restrictive clothing.
• May be an outcome of longstanding emphysema.

Effects on the body and Mind
• Confuses the diaphragm and respiratory muscles.
• Confuses and disorients the mind.
• Leads to chronic tension in the upper body, especially around the back of the neck, upper shoulder, back, and jaw.
• May cause indigestion, heartburn, bloating, flatulence, or a feeling of having a lump in the throat.
• May lead to difficulty learning movement, feeling clumsy, and being uncoordinated.
• Have difficulty appropriately pairing breath with movement in yoga.
• Instead of the breath supporting movement it interferes with movement.
• Leads to lack of awareness of breathing in versus breathing out.

Test
• Ask the client to look down as she is breathing in and notice if the belly moves in or out.
• If she is a reverse breather the inhale will be effortful.

Correcting
• Slow down and allow the belly to swell on inhale.
• Engage mulabhandha on exhale.
• You may try lying down with a sandbag on the belly to make the breath more tangible.

Yoga Practice
• Checking in with Your Breath Page 15
• The Marriage of Breath and Movement page 16, Fib 1 & 2
• Pelvic and Hip Openers page 124, Fig 23A, B, C, D, E
• Supported Bound Angle page 128, Fig 25
• Revolved Belly Pose page 127, Fig 24
• Breathing Easy Pose
• Choose a Guided Meditation
Chest Breathing/Paradoxical Breathing

Description
- Happens when one is startled or frightened.
- Involves gasping, pulling the abdomen in, and breathing high in the chest.
- The lift of the abdomen prevents the diaphragm from descending completely, making it difficult to inhale.
- The main pattern is holding and contracting the abdomen.
- Usually accompanied by the shoulders moving up and down (as in COPD).
- Chest breathers tend to brace their upper bodies, even if it is not necessary for the task they are doing.
- While it is not wrong to breathe into the chest, it is not functional to breathe only into the chest (using accessory breathing muscles), neglecting the deeper muscles of respiration (the primary breathing muscles).

Cause
- An outcome of a pulmonary disease like COPD.
- Living under constant stress and anxiety.
- Constantly pulling in the belly to appear thinner.
- Type A personalities who give themselves way too much to do to overcome feelings of inadequacy, poor self-esteem, and deep fears.

Effects on Body and Mind
- Tension in the upper body that is usually not resolved with massage.
- The organs in the abdominals are cut off from circulation due to constant abdominal contraction. This can negatively impact digestion, assimilation, and elimination (think digestive disorders).
- Pulling the abdominals in so tight can actually lead to back pain.
- Constant free-floating anxiety that is not tied to anything specific.
- Can lead to heart disease and hypertension.
- Impacts the amount of blood flow to the heart.
- Being unable to breathe in a full breath also prevents us from breathing out all of the breath. This leads to hyperventilation – fast breathing – which will be covered in a different section.

Test
- Have the client place one hand on the belly and one hand on the chest. During inhale have her notice which moves more.
- Ask her to notice if she feels increased tension in the shoulders when she breathes in.
- A sure sign of chest breathing is when the abdomen hardly moves at all.
Correcting
- Consciously release the shoulders and upper back.
- Allow the belly to freely swell out as you breathe in.
- Refrain from wearing tight clothing.
- Practice radical self-acceptance of your body as it is.
- Ground yourself in the present.
- Refrain from hurrying – why not leave 15 minutes earlier than you normally would?

Yoga Practice
- Shoulder Clock page 130, Fig. 26
- Shoulder and Upper Back Release page 131, Fig. 27
- Diaphragm release Variation A and B page 134, Fig. 29 A & B
- Pelvic and Hip Openers page 124, Fig 23A, B, C, D, E
- Supported Bound Angle page 128, Fig 25
- Revolved Belly Pose page 127, Fig 24
- The Waterfall page 137, Fig 30B
- Effortless Rest Pose page 18, fig 3
- One of the following breath inquiries
  1. Straw breathing, 5-10 min page 152
  2. Lengthening the Exhale, 5-10 min page 102
  3. The Three-Part Breath, 5-10 min page 156

Hyperventilation

Description
- Breathing faster than 15 BPM for women and more than 14 BPM for men even at rest.
- In this pattern, the diaphragm only partially contracts, keeping it from descending completely during inhale.
- This reduces the space the lungs expand into.
- This limited lung capacity causes the body to receive less oxygen per breath and also prevents a full exhale.
- This causes the person to breathe faster to compensate for this lack of oxygen.

Cause
The same as in chest breathing.

Effects on Body and Mind
- Tension in the upper body that is usually not resolved with massage.
- The organs in the abdominals are cut off from circulation due to constant abdominal contraction. This can negatively impact digestion, assimilation, and elimination (think digestive disorders).
- Pulling the abdominals in so tight can actually lead to back pain.
- Constant free-floating anxiety that is not tied to anything specific.
• Can lead to heart disease and hypertension.
• Impacts the amount of blood flow to the heart.
• Causes too much carbon dioxide to leave the body, making the body more alkaline than it should be.
• This causes the arteries in the brain to constrict, reducing the flood flow to the brain. This may lead to headache or lack of concentration.
• Hemoglobin the blood fails to release oxygen into the cells, perpetuating the hyperventilation cycle.
• The arteries in the body then constrict resulting in reduced blood to the extremities. This may lead to cold hands and feet.
• The alkaline conditions also increase the amount of calcium entering muscles and nerves, which causes them to contact even when they are not doing anything. This leads to muscle tension.
• Low levels of carbon dioxide over-excite the nervous system, setting off the fight or flight response. This may lead to irritability, rushed interactions, inappropriate responses, and overreactions to minor problems.
• All this can lead to fatigue, exhaustion, heart palpitations, rapid pulse, dizziness, and visual disturbances, numbness and tingling in the limbs, shortness of breath, yawning, chest pain, a feeling of a lump in the throat, stomach pain, muscle pains, cramps, stiffness, anxiety, insomnia, nightmares, decreased concentration and memory, a feeling of “losing one’s mind.”

Test
• Mimic the pattern by pulling in and up on the abdomen and breathing high into the chest. Notice if this feels familiar or not.
• Count the number of breaths per minute.
• Observe if your client tends to cut off her exhale or rush into the next inhale without a pause. If she does, she might tend to hyperventilate.

Correcting
As in chest breathing
• Consciously release the shoulders and upper back.
• Allow the belly to freely swell out as you breathe in.
• Refrain from wearing tight clothing.
• Practice radical self-acceptance of your body as it is.
• Ground yourself in the present.
• Refrain from hurrying – why not leave 15 minutes earlier than you normally would?
In addition
- Have your client check in with her breathing throughout the day (red dot technique).
- Consciously decelerate your activities.
- Do menial work throughout your day – folding laundry, washing dishes etc.
- Ask the client to notice if the pressure she feels is real or imagined.
- Stay present.

Yoga Practice

- Roll Downs page 118, Fig 20A & B
- Shoulder Clock page 130, Fig 26
- Shoulder and Upper Back Release page 131, Fig. 27
- Diaphragm release Variation A and B page 134, Fig 29 A & B
- Pelvic and Hip Openers page 124, Fig 23A, B, C, D, E
- Supported Bound Angle page 128, Fig 25
- Revolved Belly Pose page 127, Fig 24
- Supported Childs Pose page 140, Fig 31
- The Waterfall page 137, Fig 30B
- Effortless Rest Pose page 18, fig 3
- One of the following breath inquiries
  1. Straw breathing, 5-10 min page 152
  2. Lengthening the Exhale, 5-10 min page 102
  3. The Three-Part Breath, 5-10 min page 156

Collapsed Breathing

Description
- Chest breathing except that the whole body moves downward.
- The chest is depressed, the shoulders round forward, and the belly projects outward,
- Involves too little tone in the abdominal muscles and organs, making them feel bloated and stagnant.
- Common in people who are depressed or obese.
- The inhale can sound like a gasp and the exhale can sound like a sign.

Cause
- Kyphosis.
- Too little tone in the abdominal organs and muscles.
- Ashamed of or detachment from the body, possibly due to abuse.

Effects on Body and Mind
- Dissociation from the body.
- Disconnection from ourselves.
- Feeling that life is a burden.
- Alive only from the neck up.
**Test**
- Have the client put one hand on her chest and one on her belly in sitting.
- Ask her to collapse the chest and breastbone downward and let the head go forward.
- Let the belly protrude.
- Notice if this feels comfortable and familiar. If it does you may be a collapsed breather.
- Now lift the chest and open the space around your middle.
- Enliven the belly.
- Notice if this feels easy, comfortable, and familiar. If it does, you are probably not a collapsed breather.

**Correcting**
- Increase the tone in the abdominal muscles and organs by pressing down into the earth through the feet.
- This gifts a lift throughout the body.

**Yoga Practice**
- Tapping and Percussion page 115, Fig 17
- Lions Pose page 115, Fig 18
- Roll Downs page 118, Fig 20A & B
- Breath Stretches page 117, Fig 19A to C
- Shoulder Clock page 130, Fig 26
- Shoulder and Upper Back Release page 131, Fig. 27
- Diaphragm release Variation A and B page 134, Fig 29 A & B
- Pelvic and Hip Openers page 124, Fig 23A, B, C, D, E
- The Waterfall page 137, Fig 30B
- Breathing Easy Pose page 141, Fig. 32
- Choose one of the following
  1. Kapalabhati Cleansing Breath (10 rounds) page 158.
  2. Sandbag Breathing (5-10 min) page 151, Fig 35.

**Throat Holding**

**Description**
- Common when we feel overwhelmed with emotion and we suppress them by contracting the vocal diaphragm and throat.
- Usually accompanied by chronic neck, jaw, and facial tension.

**Cause**
- Holding back emotion
- Hiding a double chin by thrusting the chin forward.

**Effects on Body and Mind**
- The throat tightening exerts a downward pressure through the upper torso preventing the diaphragm from moving up or down.
• Cause the person to “Hmmmph” during exercise.
• Causes tension in the voice, making one sound panicky and in a hurry.
• Voice may be high or may sound like a little girl or boy.

Test
• Ask the client to exaggerate the actions of throat holding and see if it feels familiar.

Correcting
• Ask the client to release the tension by breathing out with a sigh or ahhh.
• Impersonate a basset hound, relaxing all the muscles of the face and throat.
• Lower the voice by a few notes.
• Sing.
• Speak your truth.

Yoga Practice
• Tapping and Percussion page 115, Fig 17
• Lions Pose page 115, Fig 18
• Shoulder Clock page 130, Fig 26
• Diaphragm release Variation A and B page 134, Fig 29 A & B
• The Waterfall page 137, Fig 30B
• Breathing Easy Pose page 141, Fig. 32 while sounding the exhalation page 155.

Frozen Breathing

Description
• Occurs when the whole body is braced, as if against a cold day.
• The outer layer of the body appears frozen.
• There is very little movement with the breath.

Cause
• Goal-oriented behavior with “getting there” being more important than “being there.”
• Living in fear over an extended period of time.
• Fear of inadequacy, being insignificant, or not meeting goals.

Effects on Body and Mind
• Person appears smaller than they are.
• The shoulders draw in.
• The person is under a great deal of tension and may have hidden feelings in their frozen body.

Test
Ask the client to brace the body as if against cold. If this feels familiar to her she may be a frozen breather.
Correcting

- Yoga practice to soften and release the muscles.
- Allow the expansion of the inner body with the breath to reach the outer levels.
- Consider psychotherapy in conjunction with yoga practice to process the feelings that will come to the surface.

Yoga Practice

- Roll Downs page 118, Fig 20A & B
- Shoulder Clock page 130, Fig 26
- Shoulder and Upper Back Release page 131, Fig 27
- The Cat with a partner page 120, Fig 21 & 22
- Diaphragm release Variation A and B page 134, Fig 29 A & B
- Pelvic and Hip Openers page 124, Fig 23A, B, C, D, E
- Revolved Belly Pose page 127, Fig 24
- The Waterfall page 137, Fig 30B
- Breathing Ease Position
- One of the following breath inquiries
  1. Strengthening Diaphragmatic Breathing A page 149, Fig 33A
  2. Sandbag Breathing page 151, Fig 33B

Breath Grabbing

Description

- Occurs when we interfere with the pause at the end of the exhale to grab the next breath.

Cause

- Discomfort with pauses or silence in general.
- Fear of missing out.
- Not content to take life as it comes.

Effects on Body and Mind

- May finish other sentences or cut them off.
- May have difficulty allowing silences in conversation.
- A feeling of pressure to get to the next moment.

Test

- Observe whether your client allows for silence in conversation or tends to cut you off.
Correcting

- Ask your client to practice allowing others to finish their sentences and allowing for a pause before she speaks.
- Ask her to create room for pauses in her life, letting go of responsibilities and projects that no longer serve her.
- Ask her to tune in to her breath periodically throughout the day to feel the moment between inhale and exhale.

Yoga Practice

- Roll Downs page 118, Fig 20A & B
- Shoulder Clock page 130, Fig 26
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