



Just Breathe...

By John P. Mamana, M.D.

Breathing for life is a given – yet the vast majority of busy executives may not breathe properly. A lack of exercise and poor or stiff posture caused by long hours slumped over a computer can cause a constriction of the chest and lungs. Over time, shallow chest breathing leads to poor oxygen supply, which in turn can cause everything from sluggishness, insomnia and depression to respiratory or heart disease, insulin sensitivity, and GI problems.

As you may know, your cells require oxygen to survive. Breathing acts like a pump to prime the lymphatic system – which functions to fight infections and cancer cells in the body. With proper deep breathing and physical movement, blood is able to carry healthy nutrients and oxygen to the capillaries, and to excrete destructive toxins such as dead cells and waste proteins via the lymphatic system. Simply stated, as you take a deep breath and exhale completely, you're massaging the thoracic duct upward into the neck for an ample flow of lymphatic fluid. This duct empties the lymph into the veins, where it becomes part of the blood plasma. From there, the lymph fluids return to the liver for metabolism, and finally to the kidneys for filtering.

Consider this - the cleansing process of your lymphatic system is so critical that if it shut down for just 24 hours, you would die due to trapped blood proteins and excess fluid around the cells. Just as importantly, lymph nodes create substances to fight off invading bacteria and viruses and destroy abnormal cells, such as cancer cells.

In addition to helping cleanse your body, there are many other benefits to proper breathing. Practitioners of yoga or tai chi show increased energy and decreased tension. For executives trying to lose weight, deep breathing combined with anaerobic exercise increases the capacity of the cardiovascular system which facilitates fat burning and the elimination of waste products. For women executives, several studies show that a combination of relaxation and breathing techniques minimizes the frequency and severity of hot flashes during menopause.

How can you tell you are breathing properly? One way is to lie flat on your back and rest your hands on your stomach at the base of your rib cage. With



your middle fingers barely touching, take a slow deep breath. You should feel your stomach slightly expand, which will cause your fingertips to separate as your diaphragm pushes downward. Once you gain a sense of proper deep breathing, make an effort to wholly breathe daily. It can be as simple as taking a break at your desk to breathe out slowly through your nose for five seconds, pause for two counts, and inhale slowly for five seconds expanding your belly. Close your eyes and repeat several times.

Often it's the simple changes in your daily life that can make the greatest difference. For a full evaluation of your current wellness and the types of alterations you can make for a healthier life, set an appointment with your doctor at Executive MD.

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