

Freeing the Diaphragm

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“Freeing the Diaphragm” helps to infuse the tissue in the lungs with more oxygen, but it doesn’t need to be an effortful process to do the trick.

When we place our attention on the lower abdomen and allow our belly to soften and expand with each inhale, the diaphragm flattens out and makes room for the lower lungs to fill with air. (Shallow breathing only fills the upper lobes of the lungs with fresh air and also doesn’t fully eliminate carbon dioxide from the lower lungs upon exhaling.)

- To practice this, place your hands on your abdomen, and take in a deep breath, intentionally expanding your belly to gently raise your hands.
- Pause slightly at the top of your breath, noticing how your lower ribcage expands to the sides as you’ve inhaled.
- Release your breath, and at the bottom of your exhale gently contract your belly, pulling your navel toward your back, fully expelling the oxygen from your lungs.
- Repeat this gentle belly breathing for a few rounds paying attention to how it feels.



• After several times of the gentle belly expansion with your hands on the lower abdomen, shift your hands to your solar plexus with one hand in a fist with the other hand over it. Inhale deeply and at the top of the inhale hold your breath and really push your belly out against your hands as well as pushing the lower abdomen out as if you were filling up like a basketball (put some effort into it, but don’t crunch your shoulders in the process). *This will intensify the contraction of the diaphragm, holding the lungs in their expanded state, penetrating the oxygen in your lungs to deeply into the cells.*

• Then as you exhale, contract your belly as hard as you can, firmly pulling your navel back toward your spine. This motion uses the transverse abdominal muscles to compress the abdominal organs and lift the diaphragm which pushes all the air out of the lower lungs. Repeat this process several times, and end with a minute of natural breathing.

FROM Louis Jackson, yoga instructor: Inhale a full breath (abdominal-thoracic, filling belly then the ribs with the breath) then exhale by squeezing all the air out. Every last molecule of it. Hold the air out, and then relax the belly like jello. Do you feel the suction of the diaphragm deeper into the chest? Now, repeat the above step and then do the actions of a thoracic breath WITHOUT allowing air to enter the lungs. When the air is not allowed to enter the lungs, the central tendon of the diaphragm is pulled up into the thoracic cavity and the diaphragm is actively stretched and pulls up the muscles and organs that are attached to it.