



# *NLJ Fitness & Wellness Consulting*

## *Call Today 206-852-4768*

### **The Basics of Breathing**

**By Nancy Jerominski**

Q: How long can a human being survive without oxygen?

A: About 3 minutes, unless one stops breathing in very cold water. Sometimes a human can be brought back after an hour under those conditions.

Q: What vital organ consumes the most oxygen in the human body?

A: The BRAIN!

How on earth can you maintain a nice sunny disposition if you aren't getting enough O<sub>2</sub> to the main computer of your body, never mind working out, positive thoughts or razor sharp decision making?

Imagine how much better you would think and feel just by properly breathing!

Breathing is a critical yet often overlooked part of our wellness. Because it's such an automatic bodily function, most of us have no clue how poor breathing techniques adversely affects us.

Sitting, even with great posture, isn't a very good position to breathe from. Yet in modern society, that's how most of us spend our days. Our collective posture is absolutely horrible. No wonder we're crabby, sleepy, get in accidents and just want to flop in front of the TV (great for breathing, that activity) after work!

The average person takes about 12 breaths a minute (ideal is 6 to 7), usually with the upper chest and scalenes. Those are considered secondary respiratory muscles and using them actually resembles panting. It can also add to "mysterious" chronic neck and upper back pain.

Do you typically take long, deep diaphragmatic breaths when frightened or use shallow open mouthed panting? Let's see...

Imagine you're in a jungle surrounded by a hungry tigress with a cub or two. Or imagine being chased down the street by some aggressive dog, determined to take you down.

How would you feel: calm and deeply breathing or shallow rapid panting through an open mouth with your heart leaping in your chest?

Shallow open mouth breathing, a.k.a. panting, signals STRESS to your body! This kind of breathing pushes you into the sympathetic nervous system, which is Fight or Flight. Your body has no idea it's just a bitchy boss you can't stand and not a real tiger behind you.



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The net effect on your body is the same as if that tiger was about to have you for dinner. Every single cell is literally swimming in cortisol, which is fine for short amounts of time to get you away from danger. When it's in your body for extended periods of time, it becomes a fat storing hormone and adds to oxidative stress.

### **Good Breath Basics to Keep Your Tigers Away:**

- Breathe diaphragmatically using your nose (closed mouth)
- Learn and practice good posture
- Get ergonomically fitted at your workstation

Here's a simple exercise I give to my clients to help reduce stress and practice good breathing called Box Breathing. Place your hand on your belly button and breathe through your nostrils. You should feel your umbilicus (belly button) go *out* as you inhale and *in* as you exhale.

If you get confused about how to breathe properly, just cough or laugh. Now: Inhale four counts through the nose. Hold four counts. Exhale four counts through the nose. Hold four counts.

Oxygenate your brain by learning and practicing good breathing techniques. To reduce your stress at work, when you're in traffic and someone cuts you off, or if your mind is busy at bedtime, do some Box Breathing. You'll be surprised at how much better you feel and how happy your body will be with you.