

Basic Breathing

& the muscles of the respiratory system

Basic breathing techniques enable our students to.....

- Utilize the primary respiratory muscles rather than the secondary muscles (more later) so breathing is efficient and does not cause strain
- Become aware of the quality of the breath, noticing its pace, depth & different parts of the breath i.e. puraka, rechaka & kumbhaka
- Recognize a relaxed effortless natural breath,
- Gradually dismantle habitual patterns of dysfunction
- Appreciate how a calm breath creates a calm mind and body
- Gradually learn to witness without the need to control what is being observed

Some special benefits of basic breathing practices:

- Removes accumulated tension in the neck, shoulders, jaw and face ~ good for all of us and great for headache/migraine sufferers
- Reduces back pain as the movement of the diaphragm massages the spinal column and the abdominal muscles are toned
- Aids hypertension & eases heart conditions as the heart is massaged by the movement of the diaphragm; the heart is attached to the tissue fascia of the diaphragm & the vena cava piercing the diaphragm is opened, increasing blood flow back to the heart.
- Improves the acid to alkaline balance of the body ~ good for diabetes
- Encourages a proper exhalation ~ good for asthmatics
- Massages all viscera improving functioning
- Calms the mind and the nervous system so alleviates anxiety and stress which is good for all conditions and for general wellbeing!

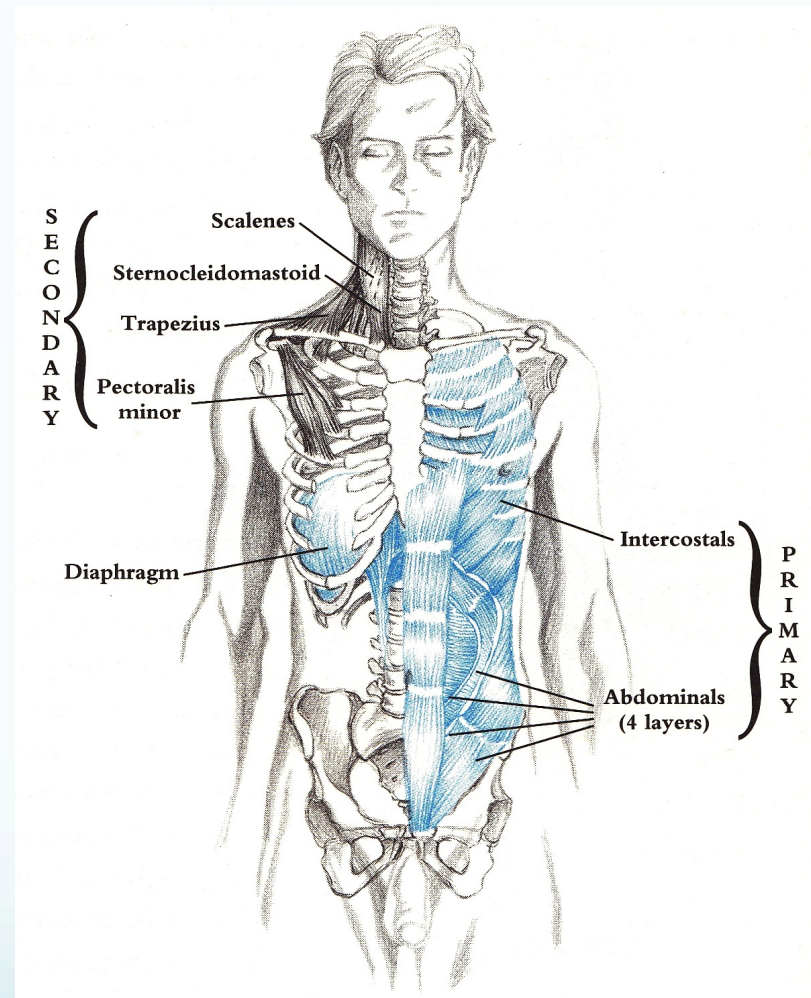
The respiratory muscles

The primary respiratory muscles are designed for the job being very large and strong and able to work tirelessly over 22,000 times per day.

Indeed the diaphragm in fact is responsible for 75% of all respiratory effort.

The secondary muscles are smaller and more delicate able to work for shorter periods, otherwise if overused they finally become taut and exhausted.

In addition the primary muscles are lower in the body which give us a feeling of being grounded and open to our 'gut-feelings', when using secondary muscles instead we will feel less stable and more 'in the head', unable to connect with our body and our feelings.



From The Breathing Book by Donna Farhi

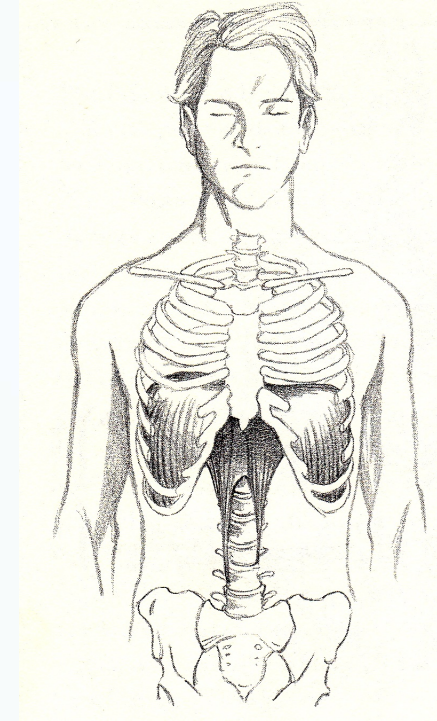
The mechanics of breathing & the movement of the diaphragm

As we inhale the diaphragm descends, and widens, displacing the soft contents of the abdomen creating a larger space in the chest cavity.

The pressure in the atmosphere now exceeds the pressure inside the chest and air passes inwards to balance pressure.

As the diaphragm relaxes it ascends compressing the air in the chest causing it to be expired.

In essence air movement is created by pressure differentials.



The diaphragm is a double domed shape parachute like structure attached to the xiphoid process, inner cartilage of 7th to 12th ribs and down the anterior spine to L1 to L4. The crura or anchor like tendons mean the diaphragm can move structures as far down as the tailbone.

Teaching basic breathing

- Introduce this element of yoga right from the very start
- Keep it short and repeat the same technique for several sessions
- Gradually increase the duration & complexity
- Can be taught at the start of a class, at a suitable point during asana practice, before relaxation or even upon leaving a relaxation
- Avoid giving expectations, it is often better to treat as an inquiry or exploration
- Give some theory behind the practices so students better understand why it is being practiced

Types of basic breathing techniques

- Three-part Yogic Breath 'yogic breath'
- Variations on the above e.g.
 - Bring arms up from the floor, vertical, 45° overhead, along ground behind head
 - Feeling air moving into front-sides-back of abdomen, ribcage, upper chest
- Direct attention to places where the breath can be experienced e.g. Air at nostrils, abdomen, traveling to and fro lungs and so on, feeling:
 - Temperature
 - Texture etc.
- Co-ordinate the breath with simple movements
- Link the breath to simple visual images e.g. a swinging pendulum
- Link the breath to sounds e.g. sound of the tides, simple mantra (so hum..)
- Use hasta mudras where breathing is subtly altered
- Use the hathenias, simple poses where different areas of the respiratory system are accentuated

Remember:

We should never overlook the importance of basic
breathing techniques for our students

and that

“free breathing is a result of deep relaxation not of effort”

D. Farhi

