



As Featured in *Healthy Times*

Brain, Body and Breath

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Upon finding out that I am an Alexander Technique teacher many people will say, “Oh, you are the breathing specialist. You do that breathing thing...” Thankfully, I am breathing and this actually allows me to write this article for you. What is most interesting about breathing is that it happens perfectly if we do not get in the way. Get in the way? What do you mean? Babies do it beautifully, what happens to the breath and body as we age?

Let’s look at a couple of examples of how we might get in the way. More than likely you are probably sitting as you read this article. Please give me your ultimate best slump ever. That is right. I am asking you to give me your very best compressed state of being. Now go ahead and take a deep breath. How’s that going for you? Was it easy or challenging?

On the flip side, try sitting up straight. Yes, I said sit up straight! Did you put your shoulders back and stick your chest out a bit? Or did you imagine that string pulling your head up to the sky? Perfect. Now take a deep breath. Is this breath any easier than the core slump from above? Or is it possibly even more difficult?

Now, let go of the emergency break that you just put on between the shoulder blades and or cut the string from the sky routine and see what happens when you attempt a deep breath from this position. Which of these three positions allows the deepest easiest breath for you? To date, this third example seems easiest as the spine is not over arched back or crunched forward, so the diaphragm can move freely in relation to the ribs and torso muscles. Not forcing or holding in any one direction allows the breath room to roam.

The Alexander Technique helps people explore their movement or lack of movement in activity. As we age we tend to compress more. When people hold on tightly to any particular thing be it a garden tool, musical instrument, golf club, toothbrush, or computer mouse they ultimately limit their capacity to breathe more naturally. Notice yourself as you are doing one of these activities. In the example of the computer mouse, notice what happens when you are doing an intense Google search or a file doesn’t open and you start to click the mouse repeatedly hoping that by clicking a few extra times it will open magically. Chances are you are hunched over the key board; you tighten your hand, wrist and arm. This tension also adds to slight tightening in the arm pit area which then limits your ribs from moving. Your diaphragm then gets slightly stuck and doesn’t move as freely and inadvertently limits the capacity of your lungs to fill for you to breathe most naturally or with the least amount of work. Notice the train of body parts that can impact your breath.

Some people say that when they are really focusing on something they find themselves holding their breath. Is it that they are holding their breath or tightening or compressing their bodies in such a way that they lock them down? Gratefully we have a brain and a body. The brain works with the nervous system to remind us to breath - if we happen to get stuck in that ultra focused state. Truly we have an automatic, self regulating system that despite our tangents we manage to keep breathing. As a built in bonus we have both a nose and a mouth as options to receive air into our bodies. Breathing keeps happening even when we hold tension in ways that limit the quality of it.

What is the quality of your breath? Do you maximize your potential by allowing free flowing movement in your body? Or do you find yourself stuck in a slump or tight with tension? The Alexander Technique doesn't advocate a bunch of breathing exercises to optimize the breath, but rather an overall awareness of the coordination of your whole self. When the body moves in a coordinated fashion the breath happens without effort. To optimize your brain, body and breath connection think of yourself as a plant with plenty of space to grow on all sides, above, below and even through the middle. Allowing this potential body movement awareness helps the breath provide tissues, nerves, glands and organs with oxygen to better support you so the brain, body and breath cycle continues...

Christie Johnson helps people discover their unique patterns of thinking and moving in relation to all that they do. She helps executives and performers mitigate stage fright, seniors and surfers improve balance, gardeners and golfers improve range of motion, pregnant women and their partners expand their comfort, and riders and runners to release muscle tension. Free your Form, Function and Flow.

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