

## Breath Awareness - Bonus 1

Thank you for taking this time to connect to your body through breath.

Allow yourself to sit in an upright, comfortable posture, as you would on your horse. An exercise ball is excellent for this but a firm chair will do.

To start with, don't change anything you're doing.

Let's begin by becoming more aware of your breath.

Put one hand on your chest and one on your belly (stomach) and close your eyes.

Notice how your hands move. Are you a chest breather or a belly breather or somewhere in between?

Are your hands rising and falling a long ways or just barely?

If you can't feel any movement take 1 or 2 deeper breaths, just while you feel for it.

Try and count how many seconds it is taking for 1 inhale and exhale to happen. Check a few breaths and then remember this number for later.

Now move your hands to the sides of your ribcage, is it expanding laterally as you inhale or is it barely moving while your belly or chest make room for the air coming in to your lungs.

Now take a big deep breath. Did you open your mouth stretch up, lift your chest and shoulders or arch your back?

Can you feel the tension?

You are trying to use the wrong muscles to inflate your lungs which restricts them in a corset of tight muscles. Go ahead and try it again.

Horses riders are athletes. Using and controlling your body requires oxygen. The more oxygen you can take in, the more efficiently your muscles will do their job. There is only one muscle that needs to work to breathe efficiently and that is the diaphragm. All other muscles must be passive or they will create tension that blocks expansion of the lungs.

Are you breathing in and out through your nose, your mouth, or a combination of the two?

For now, continue to breathe in and out through your nose or mouth. We will look at different ways to do this next time, but for today don't worry about that part.

Lets put our hands on our belly once again. Breathe in slowly and deeply, allowing your tummy to extend like a Buddha belly, do not force it, just allow it. Breathe out and continue breathing that way, in to your belly, long, slow breaths and out again.

While doing that, move your hands to the sides of your ribcage once again. Imagine a tire's inner tube encircles your body. It sits between your belly button and your ribcage.

On your next breath inflate your Buddha belly, and then the inner tube as well.

Filling the front, the back, all around. Breathing out when you need to.

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Continue to inflate your Buddha belly and your inner tube, allowing your intercostal muscles to relax and create more space between the ribs, making you taller as the air fills you all the way to the top of your head, and breathe out.

Take your next breath the same way and as the air fills you, allow your shoulders to fall back and down, opening the front of your chest, without forcing it. Breathe out when you need to and continue breathing in this way for a bit.

If you need to yawn, or stretch, or wiggle, please do. Allow your body to release stored tension

You are not just allowing your rib cage to expand with each breath, you are allowing your diaphragm to expand on the in-breath so it can contract well on the out-breath. The diaphragm is a muscle that needs to be kept both supple, and toned.

Take another deep, full breath, allowing the air to fill your lungs from the bottom up and your ribcage to relax and expand, making room for the air in your lungs.

As you slowly allow the air to exit your lungs, emptying from the top to the bottom, feel your hands on your ribs get closer together. When you feel like all the air has been breathed out use your diaphragm to squeeze out more, all of it. Now relax and feel the air rush back in. This is your diaphragm working.

Take a few more long slow breaths. Filling your chest from the bottom to the top, allowing the muscles to relax and then emptying the air out, from the top to the bottom, squeezing out the last of the old air to make room for the new and work your diaphragm muscle.

Keep breathing a little longer and I'll be back again.

... Keep breathing the way you have been practicing while you think about the answers to these questions.

Try and remember what your breath was like at the beginning of this session. This is your habitual way of breathing.

Were you a chest breather or a belly breather?

Was there any lateral movement of your ribs?

Was there tension when you took a big breath?

Now count how many seconds it takes for you to do 1 complete inhale and exhale.

Do you feel more relaxed now?

And were you able to breathe a lot longer than when you started?

This is how you would have breathed when you were born. Life creates tension that changes how we breathe, which affects how much oxygen we get, which change how our body functions.

I've kept this exercise short so you can come back and practice it often. It takes time to tone the diaphragm muscle and create the habit of breathing properly.

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I want to thank you for showing up for today's practice and encourage you to go back to your breath practice as many moments as you can.

Notice what things make it more challenging, walking, typing, reading.

We often hold our breath on our horse when we are working, practice breathing throughout your day to learn how to breath completely, while doing other things

I look forward to breathing with you again.