

Breath Practice Introduction

Why is breath introduced as part of the balance module? Think about it, what is more rhythmical and balanced than breathing? You breathe in, you breathe out, you can not do more of one, than the other.

I am not going to teach you whether to breathe in or out on a down transition, what I aim to do is bring awareness to something we do all day, every day, without giving it a thought, and therefore do not do as well as we could.

One of the things following a breathing practice has done for me, is relax my diaphragm and increase my lung capacity. The greater the lung capacity, the more oxygen is available for my body to stay healthy. But it has done so much more than that.

It's not just about the breath. The practice of breathing leads to an awareness of your body and the space it occupies. A breathing practice can help you identify and release tightness in your body. Tightness which will interfere with your ability to communicate clearly with your horse.

Following a breathing practice will also improve your ability to stay focused on a task. With practice you will not have to focus on the breathing but will have learned how to quiet the other thoughts and stay in the moment. You will have learned to be present. Horses are always present and deserve the respect of us being present with them.

There are many sub-benefits of having a breathing practice as well, which depend on the person, but may include relieving stress, sleeping better, improved balance and coordination, a more relaxed horse and a higher performance level.

Notice your breathing right now...

Are you taking full deep breaths or are you only breathing in to the top of your lungs?

Now take a big deep breath.

Did you open your mouth, stretch up, lift your chest or arch your back? Did you feel tension? You are trying to use muscles to inflate your lungs while restricting them in a corset of tight muscles.

Men are more inclined to belly breathe and women are more inclined to chest breathe, and hold in the belly, but when it's time to exert themselves, both groups use only the top 1/3 of their lungs.

The #3 rider problem is students not breathing. Now obviously they're breathing some or they would pass out and fall off. Coaches detect this problem in riders of all levels either through observing tense horses (I mean wouldn't you tense up if your horse held his breath?) or through your tense muscles interfering with suppleness and causing unevenness.

That's why the bonus breath practice's begin with the balance module and leading into the suppleness module. They are key to relaxing ourselves and our horse and improving performance. As we work through the breath practices, we will become more aware of our own tension so we are not causing our horse's tension. We will improve our ability to focus on the task at hand, becoming present both for ourselves and our horse.