Book Reviews

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Breathing for Peak Performance: Functional Exercises for Dance, Yoga, and Pilates

Eric Franklin
Champaign, Illinois, Human Kinetics, 2019
Price: $17.95 paper

In *Breathing for Peak Performance: Functional Exercises for Dance, Yoga, and Pilates,* Eric Franklin makes a case for something we easily "take for granted": breathing. In writing the text, Franklin had in mind diverse target groups: dance and movement professionals, vocal coaches, physical therapists, and runners and other athletes. Like so many of Franklin's books, *Breathing for Peak Performance* offers an anatomy-based approach to conditioning for optimal function and peak performance.

The book is divided into four parts: "Diaphragm," "Rib Cage," "Lungs," and "Muscles of Breathing." In Part 1, Franklin includes a detailed description of the diaphragm and its proper functioning. He includes goals for breathing (for example, "reduced gripping and unnecessary tension" and "even movement distribution between breathing regions"). Part 2 begins, too, with anatomy and function—of the rib cage; Part 3, with a thorough description of the lungs, and with clear language, "The alveoli are covered by surfactant to reduce the surface tension created by the thin film of water inside them. As you inhale, much of the resistance to the expansion of the lungs stems from this surface tension…." Chapter 4 provides a rather full discussion of the muscles of breathing—primary and accessory muscles of breathing, abdominal muscles and breathing, the core and breathing, and then illustrates related concepts with exercises.

Breathing for Peak Performance, is full of effective exercises—over 30 for understanding the anatomy of breathing, including related skeletal function and movement as well as training the muscles that assist with breathing. These include visualizing the diaphragm, imagining the movement of the diaphragm, feeling the movement of the abdominal wall, visualizing the movement of the pelvic floor, shaking the diaphragm to increase circulation and proprioception, stretching your diaphragm, elastic sternum and rib cartilages, spiraling [the] lungs, and jumping with your breath.

The author argues that to improve breathing, we need to address counterproductive behaviors that make breathing less effective. These are tension, poor posture, and negative thinking. Franklin offers observation and simple exercises to detect each and then relax into more productive breathing and posture.

Some of the discussion reflects an evolutionary perspective on breathing. This is illustrated in his explanation of abdominal breathing, explaining perhaps "why mammals lack ribs below the 12th thoracic vertebra. As you inhale, the organs below the diaphragm are pushed downward by the descending diaphragm. The abdominal wall moves outward…something that would not be possible with a bony wall of ribs."

Fully illustrated with highly detailed and imaginative illustrations and photographs, this compact text is highly useful. Franklin invites the reader to choose "two or three of the exercises…and practice them for a few minutes every day." He maintains that performing such exercises is one of the most important activities we can do to develop movement skills and improve health. This book, packed with information and practical suggestions, is recommended for practitioners and educators alike.

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