

# Exercise, Breathing and Aging Well

## Why Some Workouts Don't Work, Aren't Fun, and How to Change That

"From proper physical exercise, one gets lightness, capacity to work, firmness, tolerance of difficulties, diminution of physical impurities, and strengthening of digestion and metabolism" Cherak

### **Exercise not with a striving mind, but with a receptive body.**

– *Yogic axiom*

Today's society places a lot of emphasis on healthy living by exercising three times a week and eating three good meals a day. However we probably don't realize that to achieve this, correct breathing habits must be involved as the foundation for a healthy lifestyle.

As well as commencing and ending our lives, breathing is the single largest component of our daily processes. We breathe on average 15,000 times a day, and how we breathe determines how healthy we are or will be.

We are conditioned to believe breathing is an involuntary action. I lost two dear friends to heart attacks, one from jogging and one from tennis. The heart must have adequate oxygen. Both friends had poor warm-up habits. Part of warming up is to get the natural breathing reflex to enlarge and stretch allowing the lungs to take in extra oxygen in the smaller air sacs towards the outer portion of the lungs. Exercising with a striving mind and insufficient breath can prove fatal. Torn or sore muscles, stressful over-training and excess free radical production often result.

Low impact moderate exercise is beneficial for most. If you exercise with unbalanced breathing though, you will probably maintain a significant degree of unbalanced breathing; throughout your life. Practice makes permanent, not necessarily perfect. One should use the breath as a foundation for exertion. Many champion athletes exercise "around" the breath, in other words they use the sensing feeling feedback of the breath to guide them in their exertions and pacing. Others develop respiratory faults that often lead to chronic fatigue, asthma and emphysema in their later years. I train exercisers to breathe and move, not move then breathe. At least one enlightened high school coach has his athletes join the school choir. Learning to breathe better will reduce recovery times and smooth out long distance runs. Optimal breathers do not get sick.

### **EXERCISE OR HARMFUL STRESS?**

Non breathing-based exercise is often a sophisticated form of self-punishment. To breathe too much under consistent stress can create or reinforce an unconscious belief that painful stress is beneficial: "Boy, what a great workout I had today!" said he or she while dragging themselves through the front door gasping or breath heaving. Some may believe that not being able to catch one's breath for several minutes after intense exercise is a sign of working to maximum capacity, and that that is good. It may condition, but whatever your heart rate monitor says, it also may re-enforce a spontaneous and almost continuous subtle or severe stress response. Many have dropped dead from a heart attack or stroke during a stress test or the day after.

### **GROUND AND COORDINATE IT**

Almost any exertion needs the foundation and energy force of the breath. Although many

activities such as competitive sports, do not readily permit continuous, full, deep, rhythmic breathing, the non competitive exercise oriented ones can and should allow for the inner sensing that people like Dennis Lewis, Carola Speads and myself speak about so much.

Using “proper” breathing during these activities will help keep the breath balanced in the faster competitive activities. Recovery times will shorten, runs will smooth out and many will cease gasping and breath-heaving during exercise.

## **AWARENESS**

You absolutely must redevelop a strong relationship with your natural [breathing reflex](#).

Clinical Exercise Physiology is at the leading edge. Yet the energy of many of its students/teachers speaks of stress and “hyper-doingness”. Dance therapy plus Pilates can facilitate gentleness and flexibility. [Yoga](#) and Tai Chi can heal illness, save lives and as well as develop breathing blocks that invite short term healing and long term compromise of breathing ease and depth. All these forms of exercise and movement can be absolutely wonderful, health giving but there has not been one person that I have not added ease or freedom of breath to. Something was missing.

## **PERSONAL TRAINING**

A primary factor I’ve observed between a someone being recommended a specific exercise and the exerciser’s enjoying it, is how they are trained to breathe. I’ve had clients tell me that when they learned to breathe better/easier they felt more like exercising. They enthusiastically asked when we could get back to the gym, or weight room.

It’s almost always best to be trained by someone who knows more than you. The problem with the breath is finding that someone. Many personal trainers, including some exercise physiologists, design gym equipment seen in public workout rooms. After using most of the equipment I conclude that many equipment designers are not as in touch with the breath as I would have hoped. Most I’ve seen being trained are too often being pushed beyond any easy breath into upper body constriction and reduced ability to breathe. I recommend [specific equipment](#).

I can’t get a dear friend of mine into the most gentle of weight training because she was mishandled by an over-eager type with I’m sure good intentions that sent her home to soreness and stiffness that lasted for days. It just added to her already stressed out state. Soreness makes it more difficult to breathe. In addition, when you push the body and constrict the chest you make the heart work harder than it needs to. I believe this can exacerbate heart conditions. Sweating is great but I believe should not be at the expense of the larger, effortless breath. Workouts just take a little longer, that’s all.

Bring the [Secrets of Optimal Natural Breathing™](#) with you to any exercise trainer. This may be helpful to see if the trainer is open to new information. I’ve a weight training workout regimen outlined in the workbook. It only addresses breathing so there will be plenty to learn from them in conjunction with that.

## **PHYSICAL THERAPY**

The physical therapist’s “visceral motility and posture” are key points and they often improve their patient’s breathing. But for optimal breathing one needs be trained in a “coordinated” fashion that includes voice/sound production. This accent on sound

reproduction ensures that the internal sensing of the breath is replicatable and measurable. Not "singing" per se but "breathing". If you can breathe right you can sing but if you sing you do not necessarily breathe right. Physical therapists, with all their CPT codes and patient load driven stress levels aren't given the time to train clients in a breathing coordinated effort. Especially involving the voice.

### **EXERCISE AS MEDITATION**

Hakuin, one of the most famous Zen Buddhists in history said, "Meditation in movement is a billion times superior to meditation in stillness", and George Leonard and Michael Murphy in "The Life We are Given" write that we don't just practice to achieve our goals, we have goals in order to enhance our practice, for we regard practice as having great value in itself.

This can include a walk in the woods, Tai Chi, Chi Kung, Pranayama, Aikido, walking, meditations and even selected aspects of [weight training](#). When you take the time to breathe along with physical exercise you can actually slow down enough to be able to make the experience a moving [meditation](#). As strange as it may seem, even pulling down a slot machine arm over and over again can be a form of meditation. An even lesser form of repetitive exertion is the card game of Solitaire.

The keys to all this are:

1. How good is your breathing.
2. How do you improve it?
3. How do you maintain it?

Remember, if you can't measure it, you can't manage it.