

WONDERS OF WALKING

JUDY HELLER (ACE) :: PERSONALIZED COACHING :: WALKING / RUNNING :: VITALITY

LIVE LIVES OF PEACE, BALANCE, PASSION AND PURPOSE

How healthy are you?

Did you know that the average person reaches peak respiratory function and lung capacity in their mid 20's? Then they begin to lose respiratory capacity: between 10% and 27% for every decade of life! So, unless you are doing something to maintain or improve your breathing capacity, it will decline, and with it, your general health, your life expectancy, and for that matter, your spirit too! It just goes to show you: don't underestimate the simple, basic, and obvious things in life!

Thich Nhat hanh, a famous Vietnamese Zen master, has written several books on breathing and meditation. In *The Miracle of Mindfulness* he writes, "**Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts...To master our breath is to be in control of our bodies and our minds.**"

By breathing correctly you'll maximize the energy you gain from every walk, from all that you do, and with every breath. We have 20,000 opportunities a day to be present with our breathing. The first step is awareness of how we breathe.

Breath Beginnings

Basic Breath-Observation. Information gathering. Resist the urge to judge. Sit in a quiet place with your back straight and your muscles relaxed (a straight and vertical spine allows free movement of the shoulder blades, chest, and diaphragm, allowing your breathing to fully reflect unconscious factors, likewise for relaxed muscles).

- With eyes open or closed, simply pay attention to your breathing. You can count the breathing, "One" on the inhale, "Two" on the exhale and repeat - or you can imagine your breath as a swinging door, swinging in as you inhale, and swinging out as you exhale. That's it - just sit and observe.
- How does the breath feel in your nostrils?
- Do you feel your breath as it enters your trachea (wind pipe)?
- Where is the movement? In your chest? Belly?
- How far does the breathing seem to penetrate your body? Upper chest? Mid? Lower?
- Frequency of breath. Fast or slow?
- Length of inhale and exhale. Equal or not?
- Does your vision change as your body moves with the breath?
- Are your ribs moving?
- Is your chest pushing up or out?
- Are you breathing towards your back?
- What is the quality of breath? Labored, billowing, tight, shallow?
- What image do you have of your breath?

Does your mind wander? If so, just observe and acknowledge whatever the distracting thought was and return to your observation of breath. By becoming aware of how you breathe, you become able to breathe more fully and deeply.

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