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### **More information on the benefits of breathing:**

#### Benefits of Breathing

- Breathing retraining patients have higher levels of oxygenated blood, greater mobility and better tolerance for shortness of breath. Patients also report a better overall quality of life (Ritz & Meuret 2009). For the full text, see <http://smu.edu/experts/pitches/breathing-research.asp>
- Breathing diaphragmatically can reverse hyperventilation, helping to control panic and anxiety.
- Restful nose breathing reduces sympathetic activity of the nervous system, thereby decreasing states of “fight, flight, or freeze.”
- Preliminary studies suggest yogic breathing can decrease depression, anxiety, stress, and increase optimism (Kjellgren et al 2007)

### **More information on postpartum depression:**

Recent studies illuminate how mothers are at particular risk for depression or mood disorders.

- A study in the Annals of Family Medicine rate reported a drastically higher postpartum depression rate in mothers, at 22% (Gjerdingen et al 2009). The highest rate reported, it has more than doubled since 2002 (Stotland 2002).
- Depression does not only affect new mothers. On the contrary, postpartum depression can extend all the way to mothers of toddlers. In fact, some studies are indicating that postpartum depression rates in mothers of toddlers could be higher than in those of newborns.
- 42% of mothers with toddlers in one study who were screened for depression were found to have depressive symptoms. Surprisingly, those found to be working part time had the least amount of depressive symptoms. Those working full time or staying at home full time had the most depressive symptoms.(Olson & DiBrigida 1994)
- 921 mothers sampled determined that depression had the least to do with socioeconomic status and more to do with toddler's behavior and social support issues such as family proximity and marriage relationships. (Mathiesen et al 1999; Naerde et al 1999)

Research clearly touts many benefits from those who practice good breathing habits, especially in those with depression or mood issues (and that would cover lots of mothers and women!). In our high stress world of trying to be both mothers and managers of work and home – our multitasking has clearly undermined our health. A return to our health starts with our breath. Today’s breath is the first in a series of five, that I will teach you how to do properly and with minimal time requirements.

### **How to Practice Abdominal Breath**

- Practice this breath when you want to relax, fall asleep, or otherwise “downtune” or diminish stress.
- This breath is most easily practiced in a reclined position or lying in bed or on your back.
- If you are not comfortable on your back, you may take a reclined position, as shown below.
- Practice for up to 5 minutes a day, or as often as you need it.

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## Practicing Abdominal Breath



The abdominal, or diaphragmatic breath, is shown here in a reclined position for those who cannot lie flat. This position also works well for those who tend to chest breathe in seated or standing and may have a hard time learning how to breathe diaphragmatically.



Sometimes a person may prefer child's pose to practice this breath because it makes belly breathing easier. This pose allows the belly to expand and drop naturally with gravity on the inhale & the back ribs to expand on the inhale. However do not practice this pose if you have osteopenia or osteoporosis of the spine.

### Intention

1. Sedating breath.
2. Promote total relaxation and ultimately sleep
3. It should only be performed when total relaxation and a sleep like state are desired.
4. To be used in restorative poses only.

**Starting Position** - Any posture, but especially lying down because it is the easiest way to breathe in a relaxed way\*. If you have allergies, asthma, are pregnant, or have other breathing difficulties, please see the CAUTION section below.

**BEWARE: Chest breathing or shallow breathing prevents good breathing habits. A chest breather would inhale and let the shoulders rise and the chest inflate on an inhale. A good breather would allow the belly to inflate and the shoulders and chest to remain very still and silent on an inhale.**

### Action

Entry - Inhale and allow the abdomen and back to expand.

Exit - Exhale and allow the navel to draw back toward the spine gently.

Repeat for several minutes or until you are comfortable with this breath or achieve the desired effect.

### Alignment

One can lay on their back, or in a semi-reclined, propped up posture (think a recliner or sitting with lots of pillows to prop you up). One should be very comfortable, not compressing the belly.

### Tips

1. Equalize your inhale with your exhale, and gradually lengthen your breath out.
2. A beginner should start with a 3 or 4 count inhale, 3 or 4 count exhale; while more practiced students can lengthen their breath to 8 or 10 counts each.
3. Watch for paradoxical breathing, defined as when the chest rises on them inhale and the abdomen draws in simultaneously; while on the exhale, the chest deflates and the abdomen expands. This can lead to anxiety and tension breathing.
4. This breath is not just a "belly" rise or expansion, but also requires a "back body or rib" expansion as well.
5. **\*CAUTION: Do not lie flat on your back to do this breath if you have asthma, COPD, breathing difficulties, or are pregnant. These persons should in an upright (chair) or semi-upright (recliner or reclined) position. This breath type is only for relaxation and not for a yoga practice.**