

Is the way you breathe keeping you from health?

The nose is the most underused organ in your body. It performs approximately 30 different jobs: It humidifies the air you breathe in, checks for harmful odors, and sends signals directly to your brain. You probably are aware that breathing could have an impact on your health and well being, however most people are unaware that there is a right way and a wrong way to breathing. And that wrong way is contributing to all sorts of health problems.

Many people breathe up to three times more than they should. Excess oxygen causes a constriction of your blood vessels, resulting in decreased blood flow to the heart, brain and muscles. This can even lead to irregular heartbeats, dizziness, and lightheadedness.

The disease of “deep breathing”

It is very important that you use your nose when you breathe and not your mouth. Breathing through your mouth can bring in too much oxygen and make your carbon dioxide level drop dangerously low. Carbon dioxide in your blood makes your pH more alkaline. As you have learned, it is critical for your blood pH to remain within a very narrow window.

Over breathing, or “deep breathing,” can be a habit that is difficult to break. How do you know if you are over breathing? If you breathe through your mouth, sigh frequently, take large breaths before talking, sniff or yawn often, or have sleep apnea, you may have this problem. Over breathing can cause heart, neurological, respiratory, muscular, gastrointestinal, and psychological problems.

Why you need the Buteyko Breathing Method

One of the nose’s most vital jobs is to normalize your breathing rate. You should normally take in about 10 to 12 breaths per minute. The Buteyko Breathing Method was named after Russian Dr. Konstantin Buteyko, and it consists of exercises in Breathing ReEducation to decongest the nose, switch to nose breathing and reset the breathing center in the brain towards more functional breathing patterns. It also has a measurement of progress using the Control Pause. The way we breathe influences functioning of airways, blood circulation and oxygen release to the cells. Common conditions including asthma, rhinitis, hay fever, snoring, sleep apnea and anxiety can be significantly helped by applying the Buteyko Method, according to Patrick McKeown from the Buteyko Clinic International.

Here's how it works

Dr. Buteyko discovered that the level of carbon dioxide in your lungs correlates to your ability to hold your breath after normal exhalation. The Buteyko Method includes a simple self-test for estimating your carbon dioxide levels.

First, take the self test:

You can use a stopwatch or simply count the number of seconds to yourself. Here is the process:

1. Sit straight without crossing your legs and breathe comfortably and steadily.
2. Take a small, silent breath in and out through your nose. After exhaling, pinch your nose to keep air from entering.
3. Start your stopwatch and hold your breath until you feel the first definite desire to breathe.
4. When you feel the first urge to breathe, resume breathing and note the time. The urge to breathe may come in the form of involuntary movements of your breathing muscles, or your tummy may jerk or your throat may contract. This is not a breath holding competition — what you're measuring is how long you can comfortably and naturally hold your breath.
5. Your inhalation should be calm and controlled, through your nose. If you feel like you must take a big breath, then you held your breath too long.

What was your Control Pause measurement?

The time you just measured is called the "control pause" or CP, and it reflects the tolerance of your body to carbon dioxide. Short control pause times correlate with low tolerance to CO₂ and chronically depleted CO₂ levels. Here are the criteria for evaluating your control pause (CP):

- **CP 40 to 60 seconds:** Indicates a normal, healthy breathing pattern, and excellent physical endurance
- **CP 20 to 40 seconds:** Indicates mild breathing impairment, moderate tolerance to physical exercise, and potential for health problems in the future (most folks fall into this category)
- **CP 10 to 20 seconds:** Indicates significant breathing impairment and poor tolerance to physical exercise; nasal breath training and lifestyle modifications are recommended (potential areas are poor diet, overweight, excess stress, excess alcohol, etc.)

- **CP under 10 seconds:** Serious breathing impairment, very poor exercise tolerance, and chronic health problems; Dr. Buteyko recommends consulting a Buteyko practitioner for assistance.

In summary, the shorter your CP, the more easily you'll get breathless during physical exercise. If your CP is less than 20 seconds, NEVER have your mouth open during exercise, as your breathing is too unstable. This is particularly important if you have asthma. The good news is that you will feel better and improve your exercise endurance with each five-second increase in your CP, which you can accomplish by incorporating the following Buteyko breathing exercise.

How to Improve Your Control Pause (CP)

The first step to increase your CP is to learn how to unblock your nose with the following breath hold exercise. While this exercise is a perfectly safe exercise for the vast majority of people, if you have any cardiac problems, high blood pressure, are pregnant, have type 1 diabetes, panic attacks, or any serious health concern, then please do not hold your breath beyond the first urges to breathe. Repeat the following exercise several times in succession, waiting about 30 to 60 seconds in between rounds. And do the exercise on a regular basis.

- Sit up straight.
- Take a small breath in through your nose, and a small breath out.
- Pinch your nose with your fingers and hold your breath. Keep your mouth closed.
- Gently nod your head or sway your body until you feel that you cannot hold your breath any longer. (Hold your nose until you feel a strong desire to breathe.)
- When you need to breathe in, let go of your nose, and breathe gently through it, in and out, with your mouth closed.
- Calm your breathing as soon as possible.

Sources:

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