

Breathing, mother of rhythm
by Geórgia Dias

The 'professional breathers', mostly singers and wind instrumentalists, are proven to have unstable breathing patterns due to interference of their system, and due to habit. Most of them have no idea that by being 'professional breathers' they are a great danger to themselves and to others.

Let's have a quick look at the basic requirements of the respiratory system, that is simply having clear passages ways and let the moving parts move.

Of course if we have extra muscle tension in any part of the body, that extra tension will definitely affect our natural breath rhythm.

When we stop interfering with our system our natural rate of breath will be restored.

Breathing is a demand led system, i.e., when the demand is up the mechanism will respond to it. Control of rates and depths of breathing happens largely automatically outside our awareness.

The respiratory centre in the brain receives messages about levels of CO₂ increase and O₂ decreases, it stimulates increase in rates and depths via nerves to diaphragm intercostal muscles.

The lungs are elastic in themselves, they are attached to the ribcage by the pleura where you'll find a vacuum and a liquid protecting that fine mechanism. Any muscle attached to the ribcage can influence the movement of it.

The basic mechanism of breathing involves a change in the size of the thoracic cavity. During inspiration there is a increase in the volume of the thoracic cavity, the diaphragm descends and the rib cage opens. It leads to a decrease in the intra- thoracic pressure causing the air to be drawn into the lungs.

During expiration there is a decrease in volume of thoracic cavity, an elastic recoil of lungs and the diaphragm goes up. It leads to increase intra- thoracic pressure causing the air to be pushed out of the lungs.

The rate and depths of breath changes all the time.

When we look at vertebrate animals, we see that their ribcage is moving all the time. It moves side ways and not up-and-downwards.

We are also part of this vertebrate animals and our ribcage is also meant to move sideways during breath.

Have a look at babies and very young children. They are still very connected with their bodies, they too have their breath going without doing anything for it, the ribcage moves side ways without any problems.

Children can run the whole day long and they don't have to think at all of how they breath, babies can cry the whole night long without any lack of breath nor lose their voices.

That beautiful connection with the body will fade away, fortunately will not get lost, it fades away with time because it is at first on an unconscious level.

In the process of growing up we start to imitate others without questioning ourselves if the other person has a good use of their bodies or not.

Of course we don't consciously want to imitate, still all information goes through our senses and will stay, if we are not careful, in our patterns of the use of our bodies.

By breathing better the whole mechanism will function better. By freeing up one's patterns of use, the system will free up allowing a freer way of breathing.

An unstable breathing rhythm can cause anxiety, fear, a feeling of being 'unreal' or 'outside yourself' and can even cause hallucination, it is also largely responsible for stage fright.

Breathing is a continuous movement and it changes all the time.

It becomes an issue in singing, speaking for an audience, playing an instrument, running, dancing...

Never the less the effect of poor breathing affects everybody's movement, poise, balance.

If one's legs or knees, ankles or any other part of the body has somehow extra unneeded tension one's breathing will be restrained.

When thinking about the breath from the Alexander principle one can not separate the use of one's whole body. When the body is free, the breathing will be free, eventually one helps the other: a freer body provides a freer breath and a freer breath helps to have a freer body.

When singing or delivering a speech we need to be alert and ready for the changeability of breath, never the less, when one really knows what one's talking/ singing about there will not be a lack of breath because the brain will provide enough air in order to deliver the desired sentence.

Of course one's system needs to be free, a balance of healthy tension is needed and the erroneous ideas of how to breath have to be put away.

Once one has achieved that connection with the body&mind, the system will be free and breath will be allowed to happen.

Through the Alexander technique one unlearns his/hers erroneous patterns, learns how to respect one's system and will restore the natural breath rythm.

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*references

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