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## **Secrets of Breathing from an Ancient Tradition**

**By Vijai Sharma, PhD., Psychologist and Yoga teacher**

Yoga is unique program for self-management for people with COPD or other chronic illnesses because yoga is one of the most comprehensive body, breath and mind systems I know.

Yoga can be particularly beneficial for us with COPD. We must constantly work on improving our physical health, breath function and emotional strength.

My yoga teacher used to say that breath is the bridge between the body and the mind. Breath really is the “BRIDGE” between the body and the mind because all medical conditions and negative emotions automatically cause negative changes in our breathing such as: Over breathing, under breathing, breath holding, chest breathing or jerky breath. Such negative breathing changes happen automatically and we are often not very aware of them.

By the same token, when we are healthy, feeling well, doing well and feeling good about ourselves and others, we automatically breathe more deeply, more slowly, fully and freely. Such positive breathing changes also happen automatically and we are often not very aware of them.

Everybody is writing about “secrets” these days. “Secrets of Wealth,” “Secrets of Success,” “Secrets of Happy and Satisfying Relationships” and the list goes on. Here are the “Secrets of Breathing” which are practical and can be easily utilized:

- Everyone including people with COPD or any other medical or psychological disorder can to some extent positively change their breathing when they consciously choose to do so.
- By changing your breathing, you can change how you emotionally feel at that moment, and it takes just a few minutes to do.
- By shifting to abdominal breathing and slower and longer exhalation, you can influence many physiological and emotional processes such as lowering the blood pressure, heart rate and stress hormones, and improve oxygen and carbon dioxide exchange, coherent heart frequency and brain waves, concentration, to name just a few.

So without further ado, let's put this to practice.

## **A Brief Body, Breath and Mind Exercise**

- 1.) Make yourself steady and comfortable. Lie down or sit. Keep your head, neck and spine in a straight line as much as possible. Make yourself comfortable and relaxed to the extent you can.
- 2.) Mentally scan your body and relax. Bring your mind to one part of the body and let it relax by following this order: face, neck, right arm and hand, left arm and hand, throat, chest, abdomen, right leg and foot, left leg and foot, pelvis, abdomen, chest, throat and face.
- 3.) Do soft abdominal breathing. Return to your abdomen and observe your breathing. Your abdomen should bulge a little as you inhale and pull inward as you exhale. If needed, put your hand or a small book on your solar plexus (between the navel and breastbone) to guide your breath to that area.
- 4.) Crown-to-toes breathing. Imagine inhaling as if through the crown of your head to the toes and exhaling as if through the soles of your feet and toes. Take next few breaths with this imagination.
- 5.) Inhaling the positive and exhaling the negative. This is the time to link your vision and feelings with your breath. Therefore, as you inhale see and feel pure white light enters as if through the crown of the head and travels down to the toes down to the toes. While exhaling, see and feel grayish, blackish light traveling from the toes and exiting through the nostrils. Pure white light in this context stands for such positives as the solar energy, health, peace and joy. The grayish, blackish light stands for such negatives as the toxins, fatigue, stress, fears and anger, etc. Take 5 to 10 breaths holding such thoughts and feelings.

After doing this body, breath and mind exercise, check how you feel and how is your breathing.

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### Warning / Disclaimer

This column is for general information and education related to yoga and should not be construed as advice or recommendation to an individual reader. Not all exercises are suitable for everyone. Depending on your health and general condition, certain exercises may cause a negative effect or result in injury. Consult your doctor before starting any of these exercises. To reduce the risk of injury, never force or strain. Always work in moderation.

*Dr. Vijai Sharma is a clinical psychologist with over 30 years experience, a certified yoga teacher and was diagnosed with emphysema/COPD in 1994. His focus is on developing psychosocial interventions for anxiety and depression in COPD. He presents nationally on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Yoga Breathing Techniques for people with COPD and has written over 300 self-care articles for people and families struggling with chronic illnesses. <http://www.mindpub.com/copdhome.htm>.*