

# THE BREATHE STARTER KIT

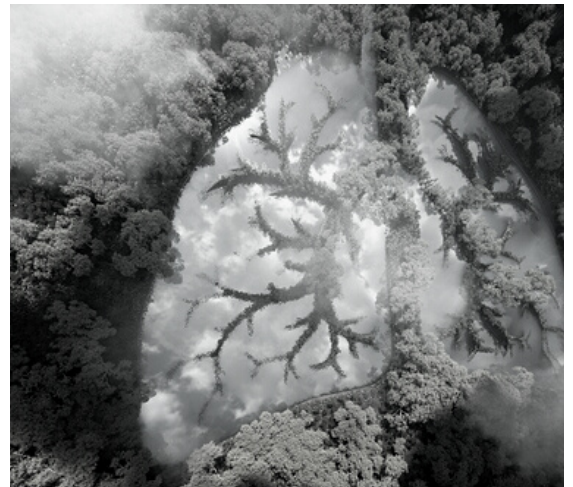
- LEARN DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING
- IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH
- DEVELOP YOUR SOUND



## DIAPHRAGM

TOTAL BREATHING

RELAXATION  
HEALTH



## SOUND

BREATH SUPPORT



## FLOOR WITTINK

SAXOPHONIST  
BREATHCOACH

### WHY IMPROVE YOUR BREATHING?

Breathing is the most direct and fast way to improve our health and well being.

In this starter kit you'll learn to use your whole torso when breathing; creating more space and helping you to relax.

I'll provide you with an audio exercise to help you relax even the rest of the day and night!

And: you'll get a little glimpse about how to improve your breath support.

Let's get started!



### EXERCISE

#### Breathing from the sacrum

This exercise is super simple and very effective to feel your back when breathing. This is the key to breathing using the whole torso instead of high chest breathing or focusing on the belly.

Sit on a chair. Place your feet directly under your knees and hip-width apart. Then bend all the way forward with your abdomen touching your thighs and your arms and head hanging loosely and freely.

- Exhale slowly and let the breath flow back in on its own.
- Now observe where you feel movement in your body. You may feel your abdomen moving against your thighs.



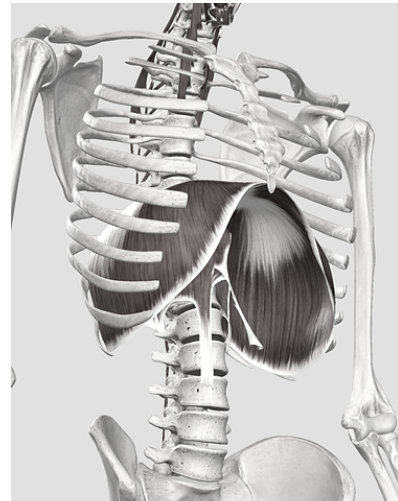
### 1. TOTAL BREATHING

#### The Diaphragm

Your lungs are not muscles and cannot fill themselves with air. Muscles surrounding the lungs cause them to expand, allowing air to flow in.

The most important muscle for breathing is the diaphragm. Actually, the diaphragm is a sheet of tendon with muscle around the edge. It is a kind of dome with two extensions that separate the thoracic cavity from the abdominal cavity. During inhalation, the diaphragm moves downwards: the dome flattens into a kind of inverted saucer. This stretches the lungs downwards and allows air to flow in. But not just by moving downwards: imagine the dome flattening out. It gets wider too. The diaphragm is encased by the lower ribs (and also by the sternum), so they move sideways and upwards.

But if we breathe *only* using our chest we only use the upper, smaller part of your lungs, where there is less blood flow. And when we use only our belly, the sideway and upward movement is lacking.



- Now pay attention to your lower back: do you feel movement there too? Or in your upper back? Where does the movement start? Do you also feel your flanks moving? Or your chest and ribs?
- Don't try to direct your breath, rather try to catch it unawares as it moves.

Sit up straight again and try to keep feeling the movement in your back, even though it's probably less now.

You can also try the in child's pose (see picture) in order to involve your back. To support your head you can stretch your arms out in front of you or place a block under your forehead.

Feel that there is space for the breath in your entire back and torso. Now try to imagine the breath starting in your sacrum. Can you feel that the ribs and flanks move at the same time?



## 2. BREATHE SLOW



## EXERCISES

### Too much

When we breathe, gases are exchanged: oxygen is inhaled and carbon dioxide is exhaled. It is always about creating the right balance. There is enough oxygen in the air but only a very small percentage of carbon dioxide in the air. We always want to save some carbon dioxide because we need it to transport the oxygen to the muscles.

It is actually a technical flaw that the lack of oxygen gives us the urge to breathe more, but that often makes matters worse because we lose too much CO<sub>2</sub>. And that lowers the oxygen level in your blood instead of increasing it! We should breathe calm, using the diaphragm, but we often do the opposite; we start to breathe too shallow and too quickly. This downward spiral is called hyperventilation.

Breathing too much is dangerous, but what is more common is chronically breathing a little too much (chronic hyperventilation). This leads to reduced immunity and a range of complaints like fatigue, digestion problems, high blood pressure and so on.

This is certainly not meant to scare you; once you know this, you can pay attention to it. Breathing calmly for ten minutes a day is already enough to start making your breathing pattern calmer.

And if you play a wind instrument; know that you can train yourself to do more with less breath. So let's continue with some exercises!

### Count your breath

- Take a stopwatch and set it to 1 minute.
- Exhale slowly once through your mouth.
- Start the stopwatch and count how many times you breathe. Breathing in and out once counts as one. Don't try to do your best, rather breathe as naturally as possible for you.

There are different opinions about what is a healthy number of breaths per minute. Five to seven times a minute is very good, so long as you're not taking very big gulps. Up to 12 times per minute is considered 'healthy'. (unless you suffer from a respiratory disease!). If you're breathing more frequently, while not exerting yourself, your breathing could be improved. You might be suffering from chronic hyperventilation and using too much energy.

You can train your body to breathe less with the following exercise, with the result that your carbon dioxide levels reach a healthier level.





### **Bonus: stop snoring!**

The slow breathing exercise may reduce your snoring when performed daily. That is because breathing too much (chronic hyperventilation) is a cause of snoring (amongst others).

Breathing through your mouth is a key factor as well when it comes to snoring. Breathing through your nose is a lot healthier. It helps you to breathe less, it cleans the air you take in and it boosts the uptake of oxygen.



*Are you having difficulties to close your mouth during the night? Try to tape your mouth; a very small tape that prevents your mouth from falling open will do!*

*It can be that only using this tape already prevents you from snoring!*

## **Slow breathing audio exercise**

The following exercise will help you to train your body to breathe less in order to reach a healthy carbon dioxide level.

In addition; any slowing of the breath causes relaxation.

It is good not to take very deep breaths in order to compensate, but to slow down the breath very calmly. The goal is two to six breaths per minute and to breathe lightly. Preferably with your entire torso, of course!

[Listen here to the relaxation breath exercise](#)

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### **3. SUPPORT YOUR VOICE OR SOUND**

When you speak, sing or play a wind instrument, you use breath support.

When using breath support, exhalation is active: you use muscles to keep the space, so that the diaphragm doesn't return to its 'dome position' in one go. This means that if you let go of these muscles, air will automatically flow back in due to the low pressure created in the lungs.

If you want to learn more about this I recommend buying the online course [Effortless Breathing for Musicians](#). But for now it is enough to know that it is possible to inhale effortlessly.

You can experience this when you cough; so cough a few times.

You just inhaled without any effort.

*Tip: Have a look/listen at the old recording from Maria Callas' *Casta Diva* and observe how she is inhaling in an effortless way!*



## EXERCISES

### 1. Hum and Relax

Sit on a chair or stand upright..  
Now imagine that you allow the breath to enter through the sacrum, as you learned in the previous exercise.  
When you exhale, you do nothing but hold the focus there.  
Now start humming, it does not matter which tone.  
Is your jaw relaxed? Is your belly relaxed? Is your throat relaxed and open?  
Do you feel how the sound resonates in your body and face? Where in your body can you feel the vibration?  
Is it possible to inhale effortlessly?

### 2. Humming with Breath Support

Stand upright and then sink lightly through your knees and breathe in. Now very slowly return back while humming.  
When you stand upright again, let go and breathe in effortlessly.  
Does the humming feel different now in your body?  
Does it sound different than in the previous exercise? It can be that it is easier now to relax your throat and have a more beautiful sound.

You can also use this exercise when singing or playing an instrument!



### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

My naam is Floor Wittink and I'm a professional saxophonist and breathcoach. I give lesson and workshops to musicians who want to breathe more freely.



I created the [online course Effortless Breathing for Musicians](#) in collaboration with Gerard Zuyderhoff, a Feldenkrais practitioner, voice actor and clarinetist.

With this course, I want to let you feel and hear that optimal breathing helps you play better, just as it helped me as a classical saxophonist.

As a breathcoach I have experienced the big impact of breathing exercises. In the course you'll find theory for a better understanding and exercises that help you balance and improve your health.

• [www.floorwittink.nl](http://www.floorwittink.nl)