

Variation on the Three Part Breath

By Helen Craig, 15/02/2013

Breathing practice is a good way to bring awareness to one of the body's most important everyday functions which we all take for granted. Babies breathe naturally by taking a full breath into all areas of their lungs, but as adults we have generally formed habits which cause breathing to be restricted to some degree.

Co-ordinating breath and movement is a lovely way to increase your awareness of your body and bring your mind into the here and now during your yoga practice. Examples include raising and lowering the arms with the breath and Cat pose.

Breathing practice can also be used on its own during a yoga class and can help you deepen the breath, bringing fresh oxygen to all parts of the lungs and improving your concentration. It is helpful to have good posture and non-restrictive clothing as well as comfortable room temperature to do this.

The "Three Part" or "Complete" Breath can be done in more ways than one. Placing a hand on the belly area, then the mid-chest and finally the upper chest helps isolate the different areas involved. Breathing into just one of these areas is another approach. The complete or three part breath is usually carried out by filling up from the bottom in three sections as described, then by emptying the lungs - as you would intuitively - from the top of the chest to the mid chest and finally the belly area. You could be standing up or lying down but it is customary to be seated in a comfortable seated position, often cross-legged.

The Deep Yogic Breath

For this version the lungs are filled from the bottom as for the complete breath, but are emptied from the bottom as well. This breathing practice in particular encourages diaphragm movement and a full breath, bringing fresh oxygen right to the top of the lungs. It is both calming and energising, and is great for deepening the breath and bringing you to a "centred" state of mind.

Begin your practice with natural everyday breathing, allowing it to follow its own rhythm. Notice your breath just as it is and without judgment. For example it might be slow or fast, smooth or irregular. You might notice that it is cool as it enters the nose and slightly warmer after it has been through the respiratory system.

Now, as you inhale, focus your attention on filling your lungs in 3 parts from the bottom: firstly the belly area, then the mid-chest and finally the upper chest.

As you exhale, empty your lungs in 3 parts in the same way, also from the bottom: firstly the belly area, then the mid-chest and finally the upper chest.

Keep doing this for anything from 3-5 minutes. You may notice the rise and fall of your shoulders or the movement of your ribs to the sides as you do this.

After an exhalation, return your breathing to normal, allowing it to follow its own natural rhythm without any deliberate control from you. You may like spend a few moments noticing how you feel and whether your breath is any different after the practice of deep yogic breath.

Sources:

DYB learnt in classes with The Life Foundation, Snowdonia, North Wales, 1981
Image of seated yoga practitioner from BWY website

