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HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

Deep Breathing Helps the Lungs

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From VOA Learning English, this is the *Health & Lifestyle* report.

When was the last time you thought about breathing? Most people usually do not.

When we are healthy, breathing happens naturally and easily. Without much effect on our part, the human **respiratory** system works hard. Experts say we take about 20,000 breaths every day.

One such expert is James Hoyt, a doctor at the University of Colorado's Health Pulmonology Clinic, also called UCHealth. Hoyt is a pulmonologist -- a specialist on respiratory disorders.

On the UCHealth website, he notes that our "respiratory muscles are working every minute of the day, every day of our lives."

A muscle called the diaphragm separates the chest and abdominal **cavities**. As we breathe in, the diaphragm tightens. The chest cavity opens, and the lungs expand. When we breathe out, the diaphragm **relaxes** and moves upward, pushing air out.

Deep breathing

When you breathe deeply, the air coming in through your nose fully fills your lungs, and the lower belly rises. On its website, Harvard Medical School notes that deep breathing may slow the heartbeat, lower blood pressure and lower **stress**. Deep breaths help your body fully exchange incoming oxygen with outgoing carbon dioxide.

However, many people do the opposite of deep breathing. They take short breaths and have **shallow breathing**. Experts call this "chest breathing."

Shallow breathing limits the expansion of the diaphragm and its movement. The lowest part of the lungs does not get a full share of oxygenated air. This can make you feel short of breath and worried, or anxious.

The American Lung Association notes that shallow breathing, over time, leaves old, stale air in the lungs. This leaves less room for the diaphragm to bring in fresh oxygen. And that means lower oxygen levels and less oxygen for exercise and activity.

Easy deep breathing exercise

Several health websites explain an easy deep breathing exercise.

Find a place to sit or lie down. Place one hand just below your ribs. Take a slow, deep breath -- or inhale -- through your nose. Feel your hand go up. Your stomach should rise and expand. Now breathe out slowly through your mouth. Make sure to breathe out -- or exhale -- all the way. Feel your hand and stomach go down.

The American Lung Association website states that if done repeatedly, breathing exercises can help remove stale air from the lungs. This will increase oxygen levels and get the diaphragm to return to its job of helping you breathe.

Pulmonologist James Hoyt adds that "deep breathing is a good way to reduce stress and relax."

Hoyt tells patients to avoid smoking, to eat a good diet and to get a good night's rest. He also urges them to seek help for respiratory conditions as soon as they are observed.

Shortness of breath happens when you are worried, frightened, or are in poor physical shape. But it can also be a sign of health problems.

And that's the *Health & Lifestyle* report. I'm Anna Matteo.

Anna Matteo wrote this story for VOA Learning English with information from the American Lung Association, University of Colorado and Harvard Medical School. George Grow was the editor.

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Words in This Story

respiration – *medical noun* : the act or process of breathing / **respiratory** – *adj.*

cavity – *n.* a hole or space inside something

relax – *v.* to make or become loose or less tense

stress – *n.* a state of mental tension and worry caused by problems in your life, work, etc.

shallow breathing – *medical verb* : take in small amounts of air

stale – *adj.* not clean, clear, or pure

inhale – *v.* to breathe in / **inhalation** – *n.*

exhale – *v.* to breathe out / **exhalation** – *n.*