

Breathing

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We are dead if we are not breathing. It is an involuntary action starting at birth. However, breathing to sing requires an intentionally learned application.

Application

- Good posture (for more tips on Good posture, see the downloadable resource on this topic)
- Inhale deeply, then exhale the full capacity of your lungs. This will cause you to automatically take air in again and will also stop a build-up of carbon dioxide in the unused part of the lungs. (recoil)
- Learning breathing techniques brings awareness to the body's muscles such as the diaphragm, abdominals, and obliques. Knowledge of these muscles' movements is essential.
- Breathing exercises are designed for greater capacity, control of the diaphragm, and support. Added benefits include relaxation and focus. It also enables more oxygen to get to the brain, so be careful not to hyperventilate.
- During sustained breathing exercises, always start on an exhaled lung as this will give you a sense of control.
- The following are 4 exercises used to develop your breathing capacity:

EXERCISE 1: **Breath recoil**

- Put one hand flat on the lower part of the stomach with the thumb on the belly button.
- As you breath in, push the stomach out and down against the hand.
- Now breathe out – returning the stomach to its original position (recoil). Make sure that the shoulders and upper chest are not moving; to check this, use a mirror. If you find this difficult, try the exercise lying on your back. If you're still not sure whether it is working, place a book on your stomach; as you breathe in, the book should rise.

EXERCISE 2: **Slowing the breathing down.**

By adding an extra count after each breath, use the same capacity of air each time to exhale and inhale. Each time a count is added, the length of time extends; this should slow the breathing down.

- 3 counts to prepare (exhale your lungs)
- Breathe in on three counts then out on three counts.
- Breathe in on four counts then out on four counts
- Breathe in on five counts then out on five counts

...Etc.

Continued ➔

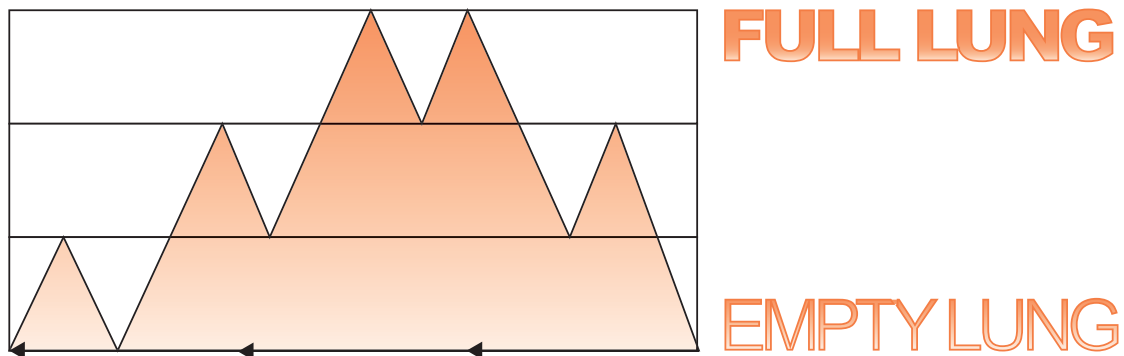
EXERCISE 3: Judging the lung capacity

- Exhale the breath.
- Breathe in a third of the lungs, and hold for a while.
- Breathe in the 2nd third of the lungs and hold again.
- Breathe in the last 3rd and after holding for as long as you can, exhale the air with a hiss “sss”. Pushing hard from the diaphragm, but restricting the air flow using the tip of the tongue and the upper teeth.
- How well were the thirds judged?

EXERCISE 4: Breathing in 3rds

- Three to prepare (exhale your lungs)
- Breathe first 3rd in and out
- Breathe first 3rd in, and then breathe second 3rd in and out
- Breathe second 3rd in, and then breathe third 3rd in and out
- Breathe third 3rd in and out, and then breathe second 3rd out
- Breathe second 3rd in and out, then breathe first 3rd out

Repeat exercise on counts of four and five.



- » *If you find that you are ahead of yourself, hold the breath until the counts catch up; do not force extra air into your lungs. The secret is to be a little behind the counts, as this will give a feeling of control.*
- » *Keep the movement continuous and make sure that your breathing is at a constant speed without jerking.*

Be Aware:

- When breathing/singing, never overfill the lungs and be careful not to keep topping up from a half lung as this will give the feeling that there isn't enough air. If vocal phrases are short, hold the breath and then continue on the second phrase. Try to always use the full capacity of the lung and only top up in limitation.
- Shoulder and upper-chest movements should be non-existent for proper control of breath.
- False vocal folds need to be retracted. (for technique on false vocal fold retraction, see HIW handout on the subject)
- Tight clothing can hinder deep breathing and breath control. Ensure that clothes are loose enough to enable full body movement when breathing.