

The most neglected health matter.

Why has the act of breathing been almost ignored by healthcare workers and the medical profession?

Barring our birth it is probably the most important activity in our lives. With our first breath or inspiration, at birth we arrive here on earth, with our last we expire and leave, and between these two major events we take around 500 million breaths.

Why is it presumed we all do this breathing well and correctly?

We don't all eat correctly, either over eating, eating an unbalanced diet or just not the right foods for our health, we don't all use our bodies considerately, we have bad postural habits, overstress ourselves physically or don't exercise enough, we don't keep calm and mentally sane but get stressed, over worried, angry, depressed or whatever, so why should we presume we all breath correctly for our health?

Well the truth seems to be that most of us don't!

The other fact is that the majority of us in the West breathe too much, we over breathe or hyperventilate!

Good breathing simply means inhaling and exhaling through the nose just enough air to meet our oxygen requirements and clear surplus carbon dioxide so as to maintain the optimum levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the body.

If we breathe too much we loose too much carbon dioxide and the body suffers, if we breathe too little there is inadequate oxygen and we suffer. The main controller for our breathing is the level of carbon dioxide in the blood.

In a normal healthy person the breathing is perfectly controlled by the receptors in our body which ensure an optimum level of oxygen and carbon dioxide.

So how do so many of us finish up breathing too much air? Well we are all encouraged to breathe deeply from childhood, we are taught to increase our breathing in gymnasiums or at keep fit classes, if we are stressed we are advised to "take a few deep breaths" and there seems to be a mind set that the deeper you breathe the better you will feel and the healthier you will be. This is not the case in the East where health is seen to be based on quiet, light breathing like a baby.

Another theory is that in our stressful life style in the West, from difficult birth, through pressures at school, then work and family pressures in adulthood plus the usual stress of sicknesses and emotional upsets, our primitive "fight or flight reaction" is repeatedly triggered but without the physical responses of running or fighting for which it was evolved. The net effect of this is to make the body accustomed to a high level of anxiety/alertness with low carbon dioxide levels being now set by the body's receptors. We are then "stuck" in a state of chronic hyperventilation.

Three major effects arise from hyperventilation which are well established and documented by medical research. First, smooth muscle which wraps around all airways, blood vessels and hollow organs in the body such as bladder and gut spasms when carbon dioxide levels fall, secondly the oxygen carrying haemoglobin of the blood starts to hold onto its oxygen instead of giving it up to the tissue, returning to the lungs still carrying oxygen that should have been used up, and thirdly, all the chemistry of the body

is impaired because the blood acidity/ alkalinity balance is disturbed, this leads to increased histamine production, reduced synthesis of complex chemicals, increased secretion of bicarbonate, impaired muscle activity and so on.

KISS, or “Keep It Simple Stupid” would suggest a myriad of our modern diseases would be less of a problem for us if we all learnt to ease off on our breathing!
It took the genius, tenacity, and strength of will combined with a lifetime of dedicated research and effort of a Russian, Professor Konstantin Buteyko to bring this simple fact to the attention of the West.

Whether we act on this knowledge or not is another matter, medical politics, prejudice and big drug business may get in the way of universal acceptance, but individuals can make their own decisions and that will create change .

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