



A Bit of Yoga You Can
do Right Now

March
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A free column by Jinjer Stanton

Breath is Life.

by Jinjer Stanton

Is there stress in your life? To paraphrase Zorba the Greek, "Life is stress. Only death is not. To be alive, is to open the door and look for stress!" But the idea is valid. Stress is the signal that we have opportunities to grow or that we need to make changes in our lives. You've heard in all kinds of media and, possibly, from your doctor, that stress is bad for your health as well.

True enough. So how can we make use of the lessons and opportunities stress points out to us *and* minimize the impact stress has on our health?

To answer that question, let's contemplate what happens to our breathing when we are under stress. First, our breath becomes shallow. Second, that shallow breathing increases our level of stress. Third, our breath becomes shallower. Fourth, that shallow breathing increases our level of stress. And on, and on, and . . .

One of the most powerful things we can do to minimize the impact of stress on our bodies is to become conscious of what's going on with our breath. One of my yoga instructors, Bonnie West, used to suggest that the next time we found ourselves being yelled at by either bosses or kids, we should throw ourselves belly down on the floor and rest our foreheads on our crossed arms.

The first thing that does is stop the yelling. The second, and more important, result is that we are forced to breathe deeply which stops the negative feedback loop of stress and shallow breathing in its tracks.

Mainstream medicine recognizes that it is impossible to be healthy if we don't breathe deeply and fully. A healthy set of human lungs has a potential vital capacity of between six and eight quarts. Many of us have lung capacities of only two quarts.

We can lose vital lung capacity through ongo-

ing stress, disease, and inactivity. (Lack of activity also decreases the heart's ability to pump blood back to the lungs, which also affects *its* function.)

Healthy respiration increases longevity and helps medical conditions like asthma, poor digestion, insomnia, high blood pressure, heart disease, etc.

It is paramount to learn to breathe properly and fill the lungs completely. This is something you don't even need to stand up for though you do need to keep your spine straight, whether you choose to stand or sit.

Inhale slowly and deeply while consciously expanding your belly. Imagine your chest cannot expand until your belly is full and tight with air. You may feel slight discomfort from being so full of air. Exhale slowly from top to bottom so that your chest empties first, then your abdomen. When you think your lungs are empty, keep on exhaling anyway as you round your shoulders to squeeze out any stale air hiding in the corners. Repeat several times. You only need to squeeze the stale corners once a day, not every breath.

Many of us are so unaccustomed to this deep breathing we can't tell, at first, whether we're breathing deeply enough to push the abdomen out. The first few times you try this, place your hands on your upper belly with just the tips of the longest finger on each hand touching the corresponding finger on the other. As you inhale, you should see a gap appear between your fingertips. As you exhale, that gap should disappear again.

If you get light-headed, stop. Try again tomorrow, and the next day, and the next. Keep it up and one day you'll realize that you breathe well automatically!

The spirit in me salutes the spirit in you.
We're all in bodies together.



Jinjer Stanton's Yoga Classes

7 to 8:30 Monday evenings at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church <http://www.htlcmpls.org/> (generally in the Mary/Martha room).

If daytime or weekend classes work better for you, Contact **Hiawatha Lake Park** (612/370-4930) for classes Saturday mornings from 11:15 am to 12:30 pm or for the Monday afternoon class that goes from 2 to 3:15 pm.

These yoga classes are fun as well as mindful and beneficial. The Monday evening class lasts an hour and a half. The other classes are one and a quarter hours long. In all classes the last ten minutes are devoted to meditation so our bodies can fully integrate the benefits of the class just past. Wear clothes that are easy to move in and if you have a mat, bring it. Other nice helps to bring are a bath towel and woven fabric belt. We look forward to meeting you. You can call me at 612/722-9703 for more information.



Yoga Bytes:

Yoga Bytes is a message intended to bring yoga to your consciousness regularly by suggesting a little something you can work on right now. For more information and additional Yoga Bytes go to www.jinjerstanton.com.

Coming up: a special event

Jinjer Stanton

Bringing two ancient paths to fitness and increased body consciousness together in one evening!

Experience Yoga and Middle Eastern dance together.

March 31

From 7 to 8:30 pm

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
2730 E 31st St, Minneapolis

For more information call
612/722-9703

Cost: \$15



Carol Singer

