

Take a *breath*

Want to improve your mental and emotional clarity? Lucy Fry investigates whether Transformational Breathing could be the answer...

It sounds ridiculous, perhaps, to suggest that the way to become healthier, happier, more focused and energetic, could simply be to breathe in a certain way. Yet Breath Guru, Alan Dolan, insists that all of us already hold the key to optimal health within our body, and that, by employing a specific method of breathing – ‘Transformational Breathing’ – for just a few minutes each day, we can access more of our respiratory system, which will in turn allow us to be physically healthier, mentally and emotionally clearer and spiritually connected.

Look within

“You are the guru, your breath is the key. Everything you will ever need is already within you,” says Dolan. “The breath allows us to reach those parts that maybe we haven’t accessed before. So, not only are you getting a different relationship with your body as a result of breathing consciously, you’re also getting a much more profound understanding of how your mental and emotional patterns work. Also,

you’re able to explore, should you wish, the less tangible aspects (energetic or spiritual, for example) of who you are.”

It sounds far too good – or simple – to be possible. Which is, of course, why I find myself at the top of the Indaba Yoga studio in London’s Marylebone, lying back on a pristine, white mattress in a quiet, light room, whilst a gentle and unassuming man (Dolan) explains to me what we are about to do and why.

“Our cells rely on oxygen energy for fuel and most of us are under-fuelled much of the time,” he says. “The reasons for this can be environmental (often fairly toxic) or mental emotional (we have the fight or flight response, which causes us to go into contraction every time we feel something that’s in some way perceived as being traumatic or undesirable). Our breath stops (when we do this) and then we can’t process that particular feeling or emotion when it’s there, so the body represses it, and we end up with this filing cabinet of unprocessed emotional energy.”

Sounds bad enough when put like that, but he continues: “Think of that over the course of your life, just filling and filling and filling. No wonder we sometimes get to the danger zone and experience breakdown or depression.”

Re-train your brain

“One of the brilliant things about Transformational Breathing is that it allows us to open the filing cabinet, clear out what’s been accumulated and, most importantly, learn how not to put new stuff back in there. In other words, we learn how to override the fight or flight response and instead to be with whatever emotion comes up, to breathe through it as it happens.”

So how exactly, do we do it? “Firstly, we need to use a mouth breath,” says Dolan. “Because your oxygen and energy is going to be directed lower down into your system, whereas breathing through the nose, it’ll be focused up top. Most of us live up top, in our heads. As a

QUICK-START GUIDE

Set a timer for however long you choose to practise for, so that you won’t be distracted. Five minutes is a good starting point.

- Open your mouth and keep it wide open (as if you had a bottle top inside it) throughout. It’s likely you’ll feel a dryness in the throat, but don’t worry about it
- Inhale for as long as you feel necessary. Bring in any intentions you have for your practise
- As soon as you reach the top of the breath, drop/exhale gently for the count of one
- Without pausing at the bottom, begin the inhale as soon as you’ve completed the exhale. A rough time ratio for inhale:exhale should be 3:1

Try this at home!

“The breath allows us to reach those parts that we haven’t accessed”

Healing hands

Enhance your breathing experience with an abdominal massage:

“Abdominal massage helps relax and open up muscles in the abdominal cavity, allowing for fuller, deeper and more open breaths,” says Anwar Ravjani a masseur, homoeopathist and acupuncturist in Islington, London. “When that knot is massaged away our body releases tension – we feel a sense of release, our emotions release and we often feel a sense of being at ease in our own bodies. There is no clearer example of how the mind affects the body and the body affects the mind.”

culture we're very audio-visual, but we want to bring you fully into your body, so use the mouth and also the abdomen. The stomach should inflate like a balloon every time you inhale and the exhale should be relaxed and soft, as if you wanted to fog the glass on a mirror."

Breathing easy

This sounds simple and so I start to breathe. But it's harder than anticipated; my throat becomes dry. But I can't pause to swallow, because the most important thing about this technique is not pausing at the top (which Dolan says no other land mammals do except humans), so as to maintain a 'connected' breath.

"The connected breath takes you on to a slightly higher vibration than you're already in, so anything that resides at a low frequency (e.g. our emotional baggage) can't hang out in the same area and thus becomes non-toxic. So it's not like we destroy or create energy, but we can get it to transform – hence, the term, 'Transformational Breath'," he says.

Minutes pass. I'm still breathing, continuously, but suddenly I notice how much quieter my mind is, having been focused almost wholly on the in-out rhythm of the breath. Meanwhile, things are happening to my body; I'm able to feel my extremities more keenly than before, and there's a certain buzzing around my body, which Dolan later explains is Prana, or Chi – life energy – moving around. Slowly and respectfully, he begins to 'read' my body by applying pressure on certain acupoints (something he says merely speeds up the healing process of Transformational Breathing but isn't necessary for the process to work).

"You might feel like an emotion is coming up here and immediately get a sense of

what it related to in your past, or perhaps no information at all. It doesn't matter..." he reassures me. "It's there, therefore it's leaving, and all you've got to do is breathe."

It sounds comforting, and it is. Turns out that 'just breathing' through discomfort, anxiety, and even the strange, unexpected tears that are tickling the back of my eyelids now, does help difficult feelings to pass through.

Strike a balance

"This is about holding stress. This point here," says Dolan, pushing on a very tender spot on my stomach. "It's alright to be yourself," he adds, moving down to a sensitive spot on my quadriceps. "This is about the balance between masculine and feminine within us. You know the balance you have is just perfect for you?"

Is this a rhetorical question, or just a statement? I don't know. All I know is that, what he has hit here is raw, painful and real. And all I can do is breathe. Mouth open. No pause. Keep it connected, all the time.

MORE INFO:

Alan Dolan lives in Lanzarote where he runs Transformational Breathing retreats (starting at £535 for delicious vegan food, transfers, five star accommodation and individual daily sessions). He returns to London every six weeks to take workshops (from £45) and see clients on an individual basis at Indaba yoga (from £100 per session). Visit indabayoga.com and breathguru.com for details.