

# Diaphragmatic Breathing

Your pelvic floor muscles and your diaphragm work in a coordinated fashion. When you inhale, your diaphragm contracts and lowers, gently compressing your abdominal contents, resulting in belly expansion. In order to make room for this expansion, the pelvic floor muscles lengthen and lower as well.

We capitalize on this relationship by teaching diaphragmatic breathing as a way to help lengthen and relax the pelvic floor. This can help improve overall awareness of the muscles themselves, reduce pain, and help reduce increased urinary urge and frequency. It can also help facilitate passing bowel movements without strain, and decrease pain during childbirth.

To perform diaphragmatic breathing:

- Lay on your back, with your eyes gently closed.
- Place one hand on your chest, and one hand on your belly. As you breathe, notice which hand moves more.
- As you inhale, try to keep the movement under your chest hand at a minimum, and instead allow the belly to expand under your other hand.
- As you exhale, the belly will gently descend.
- As you continue to inhale, imagine your lower ribs, belly and low back are inflating like an inner tube around your entire midsection. Resist the urge to push your belly out or to take huge breaths; instead, allow the breath to slowly enter and exit through your nose.
- Continue breathing in this way for 2-3 minutes.
- As this gets easier for you, begin breathing this way in different positions, like sidelying, sitting, and standing.
- If at any time you feel lightheaded while practicing, STOP and return to your regular breathing pattern. Remember, this should be a relaxed way of breathing.
- If you have difficulty accessing this belly breath, try placing a weight on your belly, like a bag of rice. This can provide tactile feedback for your brain, to help you locate your diaphragm more easily. Again, this should NOT be uncomfortable in any way. If it is, take the weight off.

Diaphragmatic breathing is at the core of most meditation and relaxation practices, due to its calming effect on the nervous system. Be sure to make this a part of your daily life, and notice the benefits it brings to you!