

BREATHING AND POSTURE



A large number of body issues stem from poor postural habits. If you sit at a desk all day with your back shaped like a banana, the local/postural muscle system crashes and the global system needs to work harder to compensate for a lack of stability. Over time, this can lead to body breakdown. By switching on your local/postural muscle system when training and for the rest of the day, you will achieve better results.

When you look at yourself in the mirror, you only see part of the muscle system – the moving/ global muscles. There is another key system that's invisible – the local/postural system – that does the job of supporting the skeleton. The postural system only switches on when the body is lined up correctly. If the postural system collapses because of sloppy posture, the moving system steps in to support the body. But because these muscles aren't supposed to be used for extended periods, they become tired and sore. This manifests itself as niggly aches and makes people want to slump even more.

If you routinely slump, prop and lean, it means you are not using the postural system and are missing out on the optimal functioning of the muscle systems. Most of us need to re-learn how to 'line up' properly and transform bad postural habits into good ones.

One of the keys to doing this is breathing. Poor posture and stress can cause you to only breathe from the upper lobes of your lungs, not taking in enough oxygen. The correct way to breathe is from the base of the lungs.

Follow these simple instructions to breathe properly;

HABIT ONE: CREATE SPACE

- Lungs need space to work properly. Place the fingers of your right hand on your breastbone and your left hand underneath your belly button.
- Slump, then gently lift your top hand and ribs away from the bottom hand without swaying your back.
- Breathe out and relax your shoulders. This lengthens your torso and correctly activates your deep core (or 'sucks in your lava' as we like to say!).

HABIT TWO: USE YOUR BASE

- Breathe in through your nose (for a count of four) to fill the base of your lungs without moving your breastbone.
- When you feel air reach your lower lobes, imagine your diaphragm, which is at the base of your ribs, is an umbrella. As you breathe in, feel your bottom ribs expand at the front, sides and back.
- Breathe out to a count of four and imagine the umbrella is slowly closing and drawing in your ribs and stomach wall. You'll feel your stomach deflate like a soufflé. Keep your chest up. Repeat for five slow breaths.

Breathing like this all day, every day correctly engages the core and ensures a more efficient and effective workout. Practice when stopped in the car at traffic lights, or when watching television. Once the habit is ingrained, there are positive flow-ons into training. If you can get the foundations right when standing, sitting, walking and breathing, you will be able to achieve much more when exercising. Plus, you will look and feel better when your posture is aligned.