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## **Breathing Relaxation for Lungs and Heart “Tune-Up” A Tool for Relaxation and Stress Management**

**By Vijai Sharma, PhD., Psychologist and Yoga teacher**

Here is an ancient breath awareness and relaxation technique that is simple and very effective. I have found it to be very helpful for both stress management and for my lung and heart function. And that says a lot in view of the fact that I was diagnosed with emphysema in 1994 and had a quadruple coronary bypass in 2007.

Here is the daily relaxation and lungs and heart tune-up technique:

- Lie down or sit comfortably. Keep head, neck and trunk in a straight line. If you lie down, keep a pillow under your head. Leave the whole body loose and relaxed.
- As you INHALE, imagine as if the breath is entering through the crown of the head and going down into the heart center.
- As you EXHALE, relax the body even more loose and relaxed while imagining the breath is exiting from the heart center all the down and out through the toes and the soles of the feet.

That’s it! You can sum it up in two lines, “Inhale as if through the crown of the head into the heart center and exhale from the heart center as if out through the toes. With each exhalation, let the body become even more loose and relaxed.

Don’t be fooled by its simplicity and ease! It sounds easy but doing it for a length of time is hard. Therefore, start with just a few minutes and build it up to an exercise of 20 minutes.

You may practice it any time of the day. I have been practicing it at different times of the day, early morning, afternoon or evening and it works well for me. By that I mean, if I am not terribly agitated or hurting, this exercise makes my heart feel calm and settles

down my breathing. You may experiment with it in order to see what time you need it most. It would be good to include it in your daily routine at least one session of 20 minutes. Furthermore, such relaxation exercise would be good for stress management as well.

*Dr. Herbert Benson, president emeritus of the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind/Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital and an associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School says, "We all are under stress and have many manifestations of that stress. To adequately protect ourselves against stress, we should use an approach and a technique that we believe evokes the relaxation response 20 minutes, once a day."*



#### Warning / Disclaimer

This column is for general information and education related to yoga and should not be construed as advice or recommendation to an individual reader. Not all exercises are suitable for everyone. Depending on your health and general condition, certain exercises may cause a negative effect or result in injury. Consult your doctor before starting any of these exercises. To reduce the risk of injury, never force or strain. Always work in moderation.

*Dr. Vijai Sharma is a clinical psychologist with over 30 years experience, a certified yoga teacher and was diagnosed with emphysema/COPD in 1994. His focus is on developing psychosocial interventions for anxiety and depression in COPD. He presents nationally on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Yoga Breathing Techniques for people with COPD and has written over 300 self-care articles for people and families struggling with chronic illnesses. <http://www.mindpub.com/copdhome.htm>.*