

The Sixth Breathing Theme Abdominal Breathing

You can be using your whole body to breathe. Your abdominals, the front of your chest, the sides of your chest, your back – all of it fully ready, yet fully relaxed for each and every breath. Each muscle group can be completely under your control, so that you can use your breathing to energy, or restore, to refresh or relax, whatever you needs, whenever you need it.

This is a good time to go back to the Discovery Exercise you did with the Fifth Breathing Theme: Take a moment to notice your own breathing. Especially notice what parts of your body are engaged in breathing? To what extent? Which parts feel tight? Which are loose? At what stages are you using them?

The first and maybe most important groups of muscles to get back into breathing action are the abdominal muscles. Abdominal breathing uses the muscles in the soft part of your belly – around your belly button. Abdominal breathing is, perhaps, the easiest form of breathing because your abdominal muscles don't have to shove ribs and bones around to get the job of breathing done. That's why babies breathe with their bellies. It's a lot less work. But it's less work *only* if your abdominals are in shape. (Sigh. Yes, there had to be a catch.)

So, we're going to get your abdominals into shape and we're going to use them for breathing. This is a two step process.

First Step: Shaping Up Your Abdominals

First – there are some great yoga poses for whipping the abs into action. My favourites are the **Abdominal Lifts**. They're a good work out, they tone your abdominals from top to bottom, they boost your metabolism and energize you. They're also a good way to prepare for Core Breathing in Purple Level. So, if you can do them, you're well on your way to becoming a champion breather. To learn them, go to the posture menu on my website and look up Abdominal Lifts. (They're not recommended if you're pregnant or if you have untreated high blood pressure. And they're not too recommended if you've just eaten! You'll see why!)

Another great pose for developing your abdominals is the **Pelvic Push**. It's just the plane old pelvic tilt remedial exercise that is so popular with physiotherapist. It's simple and just about anyone can manage it, anywhere, any time.

This is another pose you can learn on my website. They're listed in the posture menu under Pelvic Push.

Other great abdominal building poses include:

The Spider



Boat Pose



Leg Presses



The Bow



Second Step: Practicing Abdominal Breathing

This exercise trains you to use your belly when you breathe. If you do this for three minutes, once or twice a day, it will start to feel very natural and easy. Soon you'll be using your abdominals for breathing even when you're not thinking about it. Your breathing will be more relaxed, so you'll be more relaxed.

Start

Lying on your back, or standing or sitting. No matter what position you start in, see that your neck, spine & legs are lined up with each other.



A Good Start

Have your chin pointing forward. Take a minute to see that you have good air flow. If you bend your chin too close to your chest, or if you stretch your chin up away from your chest, you'll be cutting off some of your air flow. Experiment with moving your chin up and down until you feel your air passages in the back of your throat fully open.



A Very Good Start

You might like to rest your hands around your belly button to give you something to aim toward. If you do this, just let your hands rest there and make your abdominal muscles do all the work of breathing in and out during the exercise. (Don't push and squeeze with your fingers.)

The Exercise

Push your belly out. (Push your belly button toward your hands.) Notice that this draws air in.

Wait just a heart beat or two. Then squeeze your belly, (pull your belly button away from your hands), and you're pushing air out.

(Allow the air to flow in any way that feels natural – through your nose, your both, both, neither. For this exercise, you only need to stay focused on the action of your belly. Also, for now, don't worry about what your chest is doing.)

Do that for 1 – 3 minutes, whenever you have a minute.

That is: pushing your belly out to breathe in. Pull your belly button in to breathe out.

Keep your breaths around 2/3 full and around 2/3 empty. This is breathing practice, not training to climb Mount Everest without an oxygen mask.

THEN – to Build Strength and Coordination

Once you've practiced abdominal breathing for about 1 – 3 minutes:

Go faster!

Half a dozen times

THEN

Even faster! Faster! Faster!

You'll feel like a steam engine building up speed. When your belly won't do any more, take one last, big breath in and hold it for a heart beat or two.

Let it go with a sign.

When you Master this Exercise

Add this step.

Have one hand on your belly, one hand on your chest. The hand on your chest is there to remind you to keep your chest still.

Do the abdominal breathing exercise, with the added challenge of keeping your chest still while your belly does all the work of breathing.

Working with The Sixth Breathing Theme

It takes as much as six weeks to develop any group of muscles – and to forget old breathing habits. So the full results of your efforts will take time. Fortunately, you'll start noticing a difference almost right away. Within days, you'll feel more refreshed, more energized, more relaxed, and you'll probably discover you're sleeping better.

To develop your skills, here's how to work Abdominal Breathing exercises into your yoga routine.

1. Start your sessions with Abdominal Lifts. They're a good warm up exercise in any case.
2. Work the Pelvic Push into your Routine. It goes nicely with the Pelvic Lift or Bridge Pose, so you might like to combine them.
3. Take special time out during your routine and throughout your day to do Abdominal Breathing. This is spot training and so must be given separate, special attention. Three minutes at a time is good.
4. The Abdominal Breathing exercise tucks nicely into the warm up or cool down of your routine. I recommend doing it in your warm up, after the Abdominal Lifts. That way, you'll get your abdominals in motion for good breathing throughout your routine.
5. Do abdominal breathing when you're in your poses, using it as your Breathing Theme.

See the website for a routine to help you master Breathing Theme Number 6. Or you can develop your own routine. These poses are good for practicing Abdominal Breathing when you're in them:

Bridge Pose, Pelvic Lift	Side Bend
Butterfly	Side Stretches
Back Bends	Triangle Poses
Bust Expansion	Pigeon
Dog	Puppy

Once you've aced those, there are some tougher poses to try, if your body is up to them. If you can breathe with your belly while doing these poses, you've got Abdominal Breathing mastered!

Ankle to Forehead	Cobra
Back Stretch	Plow
Bow	Shoulder Stand
	Spider 2
	Twists

With that – you are a master at Abdominal Breathing. You're ready to take on the muscles at the front of your chest: *The Seventh Breathing Theme*.