STEPS IN PRESCRIBED BREATHING

1. Remember that proper breathing is a way of reducing anxiety. The practicing formula will be 3-12-6. It is necessary to hold the breath for 12 seconds to allow the alveoli of the bronchial tree to adequately absorb the oxygen. Inhaled air that normally contains 21 percent oxygen will only contain 12 percent upon exhalation.

2. Sit comfortably with feet firmly planted on the floor, the body weight resting evenly on the spinal column, the eyes closed and garments appropriately loosened.

3. Before beginning the prescribed breathing, take your pulse. Count the beats for 30 seconds and double. After the breathing exercise, take your pulse once again.


5. Go through six cycles, and then hold for a count of 20 and exhale explosively on the seventh cycle.

6. Now sit quietly for one minute while allowing the breathing to reach its own level.

7. Before opening the eyes, take your pulse once again. Ordinarily the count will drop 3-5 beats, but for extremely nervous persons the count may drop as many as 20-30 beats per minute.

8. Practice this exercise daily.

Facts About Breathing

1. While we generally breathe properly when sleeping, we breathe improperly when under stress. The lungs are shaped like pears with the enlarged portion resting on the diaphragm at about the lateral midpoint of the abdomen. When breathing properly, the diaphragm, which rests in a concave position during exhalation, contracts downward pulling the collapsed lungs down-and-outward, thus forming a vacuum. This vacuum causes inhalation. We know that we have employed the diaphragm properly in breathing if the stomach protrudes, the rib cage expands, and the shoulders lift slightly at the end of the cycle.

2. When under stress, we disturb this natural rhythm. We may breathe rapidly and shallowly, setting up a condition called hyperventilation. Or we may breathe too slowly or inefficiently and set up a condition known as hypoxia. In both cases, the natural pH (hydrogen-ion concentration) condition of the blood is disturbed. If the pH reading increases sharply from its mean of 7.4 to a point 7.46 or higher through hyperventilation, it causes respiratory alkalosis, a condition wherein the oxygen retention is increased and the carbon dioxide retention is decreased. If it moves downward to a reading of 7.34 or lower through under-breathing, respiratory acidosis, a condition wherein the oxygen retention is decreased and the carbon dioxide retention increased, results.

3. Respiratory alkalosis, as a result of hyperventilation, causes neurons to fire automatically and the muscles to become tight and rigid (tetany). The accompanying feeling state is described as anxiety.

4. A person can be assisted in restoring the natural pH condition, and thereby relieve the anxiety, by prescribed breathing exercises. Breathing in a paper sack will increase the amount of carbon dioxide in the blood and thus lower the anxiety. However, this palliative will do little to teach the person the feeling of balanced breathing. Pranayama, prescribed by the Hindu yogis, will reduce the anxiety through the perfectly balanced ratio expressed as 3-12-6 and teach the person the feeling of proper breathing.