

LUNCH BOXES: WHICH FOODS TO PACK AND WHICH TO SKIP

# SCOTTSDALE Health

11/12

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## Are You Breathing Right?

If you live on autopilot and can't even seem to remember how you got somewhere, read on.

Mindful awareness may be the easiest and cheapest way to feeling more fulfilled, more alive, and changing our response to stress right now. This simply means paying attention and being aware in the present moment. Breathwork is one of the simplest ways to make that mind-body connection—and so let's explore that in our last installment on mindful living.

Many people want to experience more meaning in their daily lives. It is not uncommon for people to go from

home to work and then home again with absolutely no recollection of how they got there, consumed instead with their thoughts, worries and responsibilities. In a sense, many people are walking around wasting their lives away, disconnected from the present, or ungrounded. When we connect to our breath, everything else falls away. Even if it's just for one minute or even one moment, pausing to take a focused breath can act as a reset to your nervous system and your overworked mind, breaking the momentum of the autopilot many of us run on.

Our thoughts and emotions have a huge impact on our health. And, what we think about, we bring about. Take a moment, and take note:

- Are you feeling drained or scattered vs. fulfilled and fortified?
- Do you have trouble concentrating or staying focused?
- When feeling rushed or having a busy day, do you find yourself breathing rapidly and shallowly? Are you barely even breathing?
- Multitask much? Multitasking = over stimulation to the mind = stress.

If you answered yes to any of the above, you may find incorporating mindfulness and breathing exercises alleviates stress and anxiety, and increases focus and joy in even the mundane tasks in your life. When we start to experience awakening, it is not that our lives change, but that the awareness we bring to our lives gives it deeper meaning.

One of the most substantial benefits of breathwork is that it can decrease stress hormones, or our response to stress. Specifically, belly breathing, or breathing deeply enough to inflate the abdomen, can stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for rest and digestion, as well as deactivate the sym-



pathetic nervous system, which is the flight or fight system.

Mindful breathing can be done anywhere and does not necessarily require a meditation cushion or burning incense, though a place where you can be surrounded by silence will help. When we allow ourselves to be in silence, to be quiet on the inside, and become aware of the thoughts going through our head, whether stressful or fearful, we then have the choice and ability to change directions.

With awareness comes the ability to change, since we cannot change something we are not even aware of—and changing your thoughts is the first step to changing your life.

For the next 21 days, try focusing on one of these three practices for seven days at a time. This is a simpli-

fied introduction to making mindful living a habit.

- For at least one minute once a day, inhale deeply, first filling the belly, then the lower ribs, then the upper ribs. Exhale slowly, first releasing from the top of the lungs, then the lower lungs, and lastly the belly. Try your best to stay present, focusing only on the breath moving in and out. It is important not to judge yourself if your mind wanders, but to simply acknowledge that it is doing so, and return back to the breath. Even if you spend the entire timeout wandering off and returning back, it is still a reset that your body and your mind will benefit from.

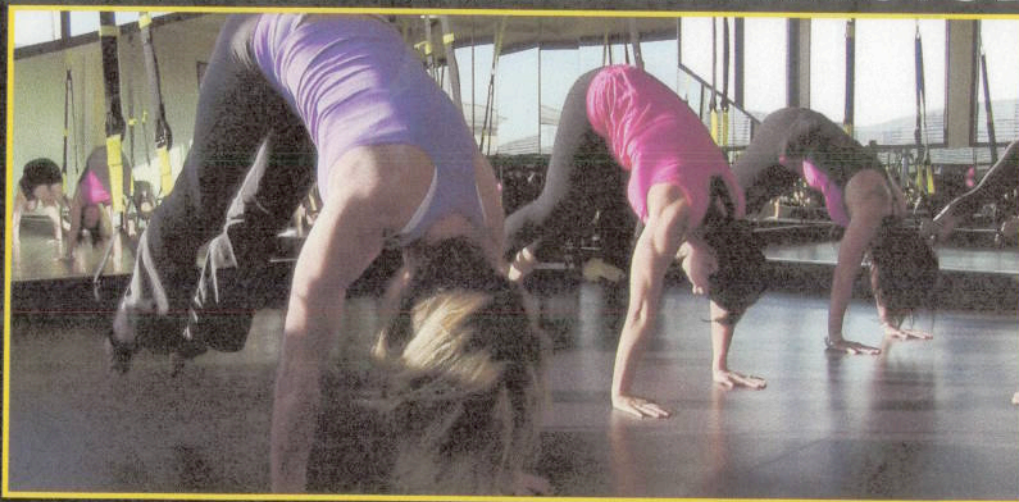
- Take five minutes now, once a day, to complete the same breathing exercise.

- Take five deep breaths before taking your first bite of a meal. This helps you to taste your food, enjoy what you are eating more, and puts your body into a rest and digest mode, improving your digestion. This helps your body more effectively use calories for fuel, rather than storing as fat, stimulating the metabolism.

The more we are able to incorporate mindfulness into our day and take a pause, the better we can train ourselves to better deal with stress. Have fun with this! It is only a practice. If in doubt, just breathe!

*Laura Madden is a holistic lifestyle coach, personal trainer, certified yoga instructor, writer and model. For more information about being mindful and living a balanced life, visit [www.laura-madden.com](http://www.laura-madden.com).*

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