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Teach Your Children to Breathe Well
Proper Breathing Has Many Benefits

By

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Every toddler knows that breathing is a powerful tool. Toddlerhood is all about control, and there is no better way to control a situation than holding your breath. According to Drs. Caron and Tom Goode, co-directors of the International Breath Institute, one of the best ways to calm an upset child is with deep breathing. When you see or feel your child becoming tense they suggest you ask him to take five deep breaths, rest, and then take five more. This breathing exercise will help the child relax, and can be repeated until he is calm and can express his needs more clearly.

In addition to relaxation, encouraging children to breathe deeply has a host of other benefits as well. Deep breathing can help children:

- Sleep better.
- Strengthen their immune system by increasing their oxygen supply.
- Relieve symptoms of asthma.
- Improve concentration, which can result in an increase in academic achievement and a decrease in behavior issues.
- Deal with anxiety and stress, which can result in improved test performance.
- Control situations and overcome obstacles because deep breathing is an excellent coping mechanism.
- Obtain a sense of calm, which is reflected in every part of their lives.

Regrettably, many children miss out on these benefits due to improper breathing. When newborns enter this world, they breathe fully and deeply. Their first hungry gulps of oxygen are taken in with an enthusiasm that guarantees growth and survival. Unfortunately, over time that innate breathing pattern is replaced with a shallow one, which greatly affects their overall health and well being.

Parents can be instrumental in training their children to regain and rebuild strong breathing habits. Before parents can teach their children, however, they must relearn proper breathing themselves. An optimal breathing pattern is slow, rich, and reaches into the abdomen. Shallow breathing only allows air into the upper part of the lungs, but deep abdominal breathing fills both the upper and the larger lower part of the lungs with air.

To practice this breathing technique, lie on your back with a hand on your upper abdomen near the diaphragm. Take a deep breath through your nose, and watch as your abdomen rises. Try holding this breath for at least twenty seconds then slowly exhale. It might feel a bit awkward and strange at first, but once you get a feel for the rhythm, you will begin to feel the benefits. You will almost immediately begin to feel a sense of clarity and relaxation as your lungs stretch out to make room for the oxygen your body was missing.

Teaching and practicing proper breathing with your children can be a fun family activity. Before beginning, parents should first talk with their children and use interactive tools, such as *I Take a DEEEP Breath!*, to introduce them to the concept of proper breathing. *I Take a DEEEP Breath!* is part of a series of empowerment tools designed for children by award winning authors Sharon Penchina C.Ht. and Dr. Stuart Hoffman. It highlights the benefits of proper breathing, including how it can be used as a coping mechanism against life's ups and downs. *I Take a DEEEP Breath!* is available as a colorful picture book that features enchanting insects and vibrant imagery. It is also available as an interactive audio CD which features two adorable young narrators who teach children why proper breathing is important to a healthy lifestyle.

Breathing Exercises for Children

- **Blow Up Your Belly Balloon.** Ask children to imagine their abdomen is a balloon. On the inhale they blow it up big and full, and on the exhale they deflate it with a whoosh.
- **Musical Inhale.** Turn on a favorite song and have the children take a deep breath. Similar to musical chairs, they hold their breath when the music stops. Two seconds is a good place to start for younger children.
- **Ping Pong Ball Races.** On a hard surface floor, have children sit on their knees. Place a ping pong ball in front of each child. When you start the race, each child leans over and blows on their ping pong ball to move it forward. The first ball across the finish line is the winner.
- **A Few of Their Favorite Things.** Many childlike activities are good breathing exercises. They include blowing on dandelions, blowing up balloons, and blowing out candles.