

Breath and prayer

Here are some simple thoughts and ideas. I hope you find them of some help.



Breathing

Breath is central to our life and faith. It is also very much on our minds in the current virus pandemic.

Most of the time we aren't thinking about our breathing but we can use it both as exercise and to help us meditate or pray.

Peace

Our body, mind, soul and spirit make up our whole being and they are inseparable in life. One can influence another. When we are anxious, or panicky, our breathing often becomes fast and shallow. By slowing our breathing and taking deep breaths we can help get the message of calm and peace from our body to our minds and hearts.

'Jesus came and stood among them and said ' *Peace be with you ...*
As the Father has sent me so I send you. When he had said this, *he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit ..'* (John 20 v19..22)

The following words, that I heard Bridget Hewitt use when she was talking about meditation, have stayed with me and I have found them helpful:

'Breathe in God, breathe out peace to the world'.

This could be a simple prayer that we make as we breathe, sending peace to all corners of the world and to all those who are having difficulty with their breathing because of Covid 19.

When you are trying to meditate, or pray, it is very easy to be distracted. When this happens, returning to think about your breathing can help you refocus.

Breath of life

'And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground *and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.*' (Genesis 2 v7)

'Breathe on me breath of God, fill me with life anew ...'

'Oh breath of life come sweeping through us ..'

Breathing is vital to us and gives a constant rhythm to our lives. Singers often practice breathing exercises to help them with their singing but it is good exercise for all of us to help keep us healthy. We may all turn into great singers as well!

Breathing exercises

Most of the time our breaths are shallow and we are mainly using the top part of our lungs but a good deep breath helps to open up the airways in the bottom of our lungs and get the air in to those hidden places. Even when we take a big breath it is easy to use the top part of our lungs most and it takes practice to learn to breathe more deeply.

Breathing out is as important as breathing in. If you breathe out as far as you can it stimulates an automatic response from your body to take a deep breath in. Breathe out gently as far as you can and then notice the feel of the deep breath in that follows without any conscious effort from you.

Deep breathing exercises:

Here are two methods for taking a deep breath:

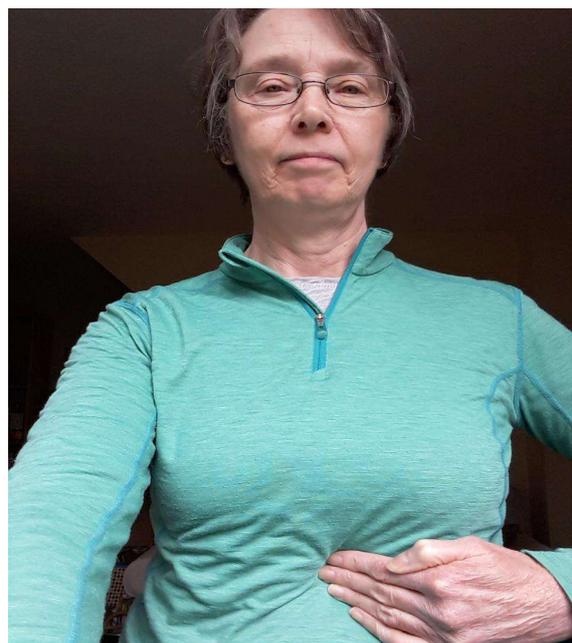
Diaphragmatic breathing – find the area at the top of your tummy where your ribs start to divide . Rest your fingers on the area just below where your ribs divide as this is where your diaphragm lies. Using your hand helps to focus on the area of the body you are trying to use and also your fingers help you to feel what is happening. Take a deep breath and gently push out against your fingers.

I could only manage to do a one hand demonstration in these selfie photos but I hope it gives you an idea!

Breathe in



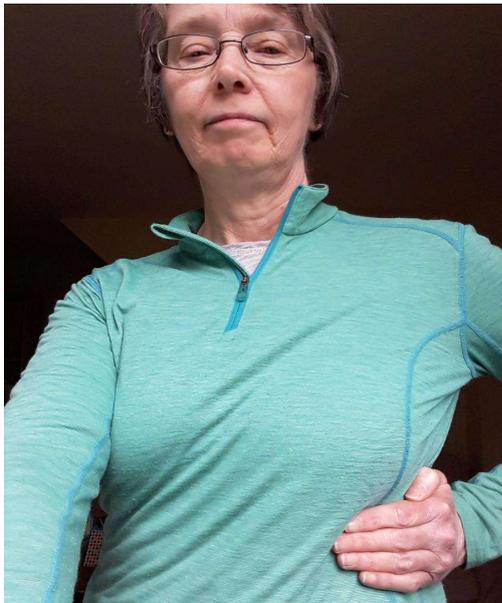
and breathe out



Lateral breathing – rest your hands on the lower part of your ribs, on either side. I generally use the back of my fingers against my ribs but find whatever is the most comfortable way for you. Again your hands help you focus on that area of your chest and also to feel the movement of your ribs. Take a deep breath and think about pushing out gently against your hands.

The photos show two ways of positioning your hands – again I could only manage a one handed demonstration in the photos!

Like this ..



or like this ..



Breathe in ..



and breathe out ...



Position – it's probably best to do the exercises sitting upright, or standing but you can do them lying down. It is quite a good idea to do a few lying on your tummy, if you are able to, as this helps reach the back part of the bottom of your lungs.

It does take practice to get the hang of it so 'keep breathing'!

Take 3 deep breaths (a good biblical number!) and vary whether you do diaphragmatic, or lateral breaths. It is also good to hold your breath for a short while, so on the last of the 3 breaths take a breath in and hold your breath for a count of 7 (another good biblical number!) And breathe out!

Repeat the 3 breaths 3 times but if you find you are getting dizzy take a long pause between each set of 3, or stop.

Try to do this 3 times a day.

If you find the deep breathing makes you cough this may be because it is helping to clear your lungs but if coughing is persistent take a break, or reduce the number you are doing.

Finally, a little mental exercise ..

How many hymns, or songs, or Bible verses can you think of that mention breath?