

Breathing Exercises and Auto-Suggestion.

By HERBERT A. PARKYN, M. D.

Medical Superintendent Chicago School of Psychology, 4020 Drexel Boulevard, Chicago.

WOULD it not seem ridiculous if we found it necessary to instruct our horses or dogs how to breathe? These animals live almost altogether out of doors, take plenty of exercise, and in consequence breathe as Nature intended them to breathe.

But man, poor man, will live and work in stuffy offices and homes, without exercise, till he runs down physically through lack of fresh air—actually starving for air; and yet, when he realizes that he must take more fresh air into his lungs in order to regain his health, before making a start he may wait weeks or months in order that he may be certain to begin with some system of breathing that is recognized as being correct.

I have received hundreds of letters asking me what system of breathing I advise my patients to take, and from these I have selected the following typical letter.

"I read, with a great deal of interest and profit, your article, 'How to Keep Healthy in Winter,' which appeared in a recent number of SUGGESTION. Now I know a person should drink about two quarts of water per day and should eat a fair amount of wholesome food. These are two of the 'life essentials,' but the third essential, air, has to be obtained by exercises in breathing. I have paid attention to my liquids and food, but am waiting for some instructions in the proper method of breathing. There are so many systems of breathing advocated that I have never known

which to choose, and I turn to you for advice.

"There must be a right way and a wrong way to breathe, and before taking up regular breathing exercises, I want to know the best method to pursue.

"I might add that I have been a chronic sufferer for years, but since reading SUGGESTION I have been looking after the 'life essentials,' and have improved wonderfully since eating and drinking properly, but I have hesitated to take breathing exercises until, as I said before, I knew the proper method to use."

This letter is on a par with another I received from a man who said he was saving up to buy a distilling apparatus before he would in-



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crease his liquids to the allotted two quarts per diem. Both these men remind me of the man who was burned to death because he hesitated too long for fear he would take cold if he left his burning house in his night-gown.

If you discover today that you have been drinking only a quart of fluids a day, when you require two quarts, don't wait to get a distilling apparatus, but start in *at once* to increase your fluids. Drink boiled water if it is handy, and if there is no boiled water at hand and your supply of drinking water is considered bad, drink the best bad water you can get; but drink the water first and send for your still afterward. You will make more trouble in your system by denying yourself water because it is said to be bad, than by drinking all your system requires even if the water be bad.

And so it is with breathing. If you find you have not been getting sufficient air into your lungs, get out doors and breathe air. Or if you are shut up in an office in which the air is not good, get fresh air into the room if you can; and if you can not improve the air, then breathe in more of the bad air and take steps afterward to change the system of ventilation; and when you get out of doors endeavor to make up for the bad air you were forced to breathe while indoors—breathe; breathe deeply anyhow, in any way you know, and hunt up your systems of breathing later if you are determined to have a system for taking every breath.

SYSTEMS OF BREATHING.

I am not ridiculing the various systems of breathing that are taught. I believe thoroughly in them all, no matter how different they may be, and I believe one system is as good as another—any system will do if the exercises are taken faithfully with a definite purpose in mind. All these systems of breathing perform a double purpose. First, the person practicing them faithfully certainly gets more air into his lungs than if he took no exercises at all. Second, every time a breathing exercise is taken, it is taken for a purpose, and the purpose kept in mind tends to materialize, for thought takes form in action. In other words, conscious or unconscious, the auto-suggestions which invariably accompany the exercises assist in bringing about the desired results.

A person who is strong and healthy usually breathes deeply and gets all the air he requires without conscious effort. He needs no system of breathing. But a person who is run down physically seldom breathes deeply, for the impulses to the organs of respiration become feeble in proportion to the decline in health. Consequently, if a person's health is below par, it is important that his attention be called to the necessity for helping himself to as much air as he should take if in perfect health.

It is not necessary that a patient of this kind shall breathe according to any particular system. All he need do is to breathe until he is conscious of having taken more air into his lungs than usual, and the beneficial effects will follow if he breathes deeply for a few minutes eight or ten times a day. But it is not sufficient to secure the desired results in the average person simply to tell him he must breathe more air. He may think of it now and again, for a day or two, and then forget to make further efforts to breathe deeply, and here is where the value of employing some systems of breathing comes in, for the mere act of breathing in an unusual manner, as required by the exercises, calls to mind the necessity for deep breathing, many times during the day, and the exercises taken accordingly require an effort of the will in their accomplishment, and in this way strengthen the auto-suggestions.

The best and proper way to breathe is "abdominal breathing." Men, as a rule, especially in health, breathe from the abdomen, but women, from wearing corsets and hanging heavy clothing around their waists, breathe, as a rule, from the chest.

Here is the way to breathe from the abdomen:

Take a full, long, deep breath, so deep that not only is the chest raised, but you are also conscious that the abdomen has been distended. Now hold the chest up and keep it distended and let the breath out gradually by drawing the abdomen in and up. When the air is forced out of the lungs by contracting the abdomen and drawing it up, take in another breath till the abdomen is again distended, and continue breathing this way, all the time holding the chest up so that there is very little motion in it.

ADVANTAGES OF ABDOMINAL BREATHING.

Abdominal breathing has a double effect. In the first place it enables one to fill the lungs to their greatest capacity, and again, the movement of the abdomen acts as a massage to the intestines and stomach. I have seen constipation of twenty years' standing overcome in a few days by abdominal breathing. The patient was in good health otherwise, looked after the life essentials well, but breathed entirely from the chest, not a movement of the abdomen being discernible. The change to abdominal breathing worked like a charm.

This is one breathing exercise I require all patients to use. They can practice other exercises recommended by others if they desire, or can make up exercises for themselves, but I keep them practicing the abdominal breathing until it has become a habit. It can be practiced either sitting or standing, or lying down, but should be practiced consciously for several minutes at a time, eight or ten times a day, until it has become a habit.

A good way to practice this method of breathing is while walking.

Hold yourself erect, fill the lungs, and then let out the breath while taking five or six steps and take it in during the next five or six steps. Brisk walking increases the value of this exercise, and the steps with each inhalation or each exhalation can be increased to seven or eight. Endeavor to breathe through the nostrils while taking this exercise.

A person whose health is below par should pay careful attention to the life essentials; and in helping himself to air he is endeavoring to accomplish a purpose: he is using auto-suggestion with every breath taken through design, and many of the remarkable results that have followed the practice of some system of breathing and exercising have been due to auto-suggestion rather than to the special system employed. This being the case, I would recommend anyone practicing deep breathing to formulate his auto-suggestions and go over them in his mind every time he goes through the exercises, for in this way he can heighten their effect.

So much can be accomplished through the intelligent use of auto-suggestion, not only in improving the physical health, but in bringing about desirable mental conditions, and influencing our daily lives, that it is a good plan to study the auto-suggestions that will benefit us, and employ them faithfully. But it is difficult sometimes to remember to use the auto-suggestions regularly. For this reason it is always desirable to have some practical thing to enable us to recall them, and breathing exercises will do this admirably. In fact, in my practice, I frequently prescribe deep breathing exercises, even for patients who do not require them, for I know that every time the exercises are practiced the auto-suggestions I desire my patient to repeat are recalled to mind. In this way I have seen severe mental troubles overcome.

Not long ago I saw an advertisement which said that worry and fear could be overcome in a short time. The purchaser was given directions for abdominal breathing and told to practice it often. Many wonderful results followed the practice of this secret, but the results were produced not so much by the breathing as by the auto-suggestions which necessarily accompanied the exercise.

I would say, therefore, to anyone who may be practicing breathing exercises, or to anyone who expects to start deep breathing, go ahead with your exercises, breathe in anyway that will enable you to get plenty of air into your lungs, giving the preference to abdominal breathing, but take the exercises frequently, every day; and remember to employ auto-suggestions while you exercise, for you would not be taking the exercises unless you expected to accomplish something through them, and the mind is such an important factor in bringing about the results you desire, that you should direct your thoughts systematically and intelligently.

For instance, if you are breathing to improve your general health, use auto-suggestions like the following:

SUGGESTION.

THIS AIR is one of the life essentials. I am now breathing deeply and it feels so good to get this fresh air into my lungs. I know I shall feel better for it.

THIS FRESH air will have a beneficial effect on my whole system. It will make me sleep soundly; help me to digest my food; and improve the quality of my blood; and the massage resulting from the abdominal breathing will make my bowels move regularly every morning.

THIS DEEP breathing is stimulating me mentally and physically. I feel stronger already. My mind seems clearer. I feel bright and happy and cheerful. I know I shall be made perfectly well again.

EVERY DEEP breath stimulates the heart's action and in this way assures better nutrition to every cell in the body.

I ENJOY these breathing exercises and will remember to take them frequently.

Go over these or similar auto-suggestions earnestly, not automatically, and vary them to suit the individual requirements, remembering that thought takes form in action.

TRUE CHARITY.

I gave a beggar from my little store
Of well-earned gold. He spent the shining ore
And came again and yet again still cold
And hungry as before.

I gave a thought and through that thought of mine
He found himself, the man, supreme, divine!
Fed, clothed and crowned with blessings manifold,
And now he begs no more.

—From *Poems of Power*, by Ella Wheeler Wilcox.