LIFEFIT
BRAINFIT

WHAT IS BREATHWORK?

Breathwork is the awareness and control of the breath to change one's physical, mental, and emotional state. Breathwork has been practiced across various cultures and healing modalities for thousands of years and is also a key part of many types of therapy and fitness practices.

The autonomic nervous system (ANS) is responsible for involuntary functions. When under stress, the sympathetic nervous system kicks into gear, increasing our heart rate and breathing pace. Once the need for increased cortisol, oxygen, and glucose has passed, the parasympathetic nervous system takes over, bringing the whole body back into rest mode.

For those who balance multiple stressors, the sympathetic nervous system is active *all the time*. This does not allow our bodies to be in the optimal state for rest or restoration. The resulting chronic stress contributes to numerous mental, physical, and emotional conditions.

Speeding up your breath makes you feel more anxious and alert alternatively, slowing it down can make you feel calmer and more focused on the present moment. And the more you practice, the more the self-healing benefits compound over time.

THE TOP 5 HEALTH BENEFITS OF BREATHWORK

1. **REDUCES STRESS**
   Because of the connection that breath has to the autonomic nervous system, breathing practices are a powerful way method of stress relief. As a physical modality, it's more effective in high-stress situations than simply trying to "think" your way out. Stress impairs the functioning of the prefrontal cortex (associated with logical thinking). Tap into the breath first, and you make it easier to get back to problem-solving mode.

2. **HELPS TO MANAGE DIFFICULT EMOTIONS**
   There's a reason why people tell you to "Take a deep breath" when you're angry or

upset. Taking control of your breath helps you to interrupt and redirect the flow of your emotions. The increased self-awareness associated with the practice of breathwork also helps to release tension and trauma stored in the body.

3. **IMPROVES IMMUNE SYSTEM**
Practicing deep breathing techniques regularly can help boost your immune system. This is largely credited to the effect that breathwork has on the parasympathetic nervous system, but it's more than just being less stressed. Learning to breathe effectively improves your oxygen intake, lung capacity, and even your body's ability to regulate its core temperature.

4. **RELIEVES AND HELPS MANAGE PAIN**
When we experience or anticipate the experience of pain, we often become tense. Breathing deeply, whether anticipating an injection or on the ride to the emergency room, helps to release tension and calm feelings of stress. It's why mindful, focused breathing is a hallmark of every wellness and childbirth class.

5. **INCREASES SELF-COMPASSION**
Turning your intention — and attention — inward can make you feel more connected to yourself. Breathing through difficult emotions makes you feel more capable of handling them. That makes it a great way to develop your trust and appreciation for yourself.

RISKS
Breathwork boasts some amazing health benefits, but that doesn't mean it's without its risks. One common risk of breathwork is "over-breathing," also known as hyperventilation. By taking in excessive amounts of air, you can disrupt the balance between oxygen and carbon dioxide in your bloodstream. Symptoms of over-breathing include dizziness, tingling, and difficulty concentrating. If you have high blood pressure or are pregnant, please take precautions and/or check with your physician.