



Horse Breather

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10 Breathing tips for riders Part 1

Most people would agree that breathing better is good for you in some sort of vague and airy fairy way. But fewer realise that changing your breathing pattern has a **direct physiological** effect on your body and if done correctly has distinct improvements in health and performance.

The good news it's easy to gain these benefits by making some simple changes to your breathing habits just as part of your daily routine.

Contrary to the popular myth that deep (increased) breathing is good for you, the way to improve breathing is to **reduce** the amount of air taken in with each breath. The reason for this is that most people **over breathe** and this has a damaging effect on the functioning of the body. see the brain scan right >>

Its odd but many people, on hearing this immediately claim, "Oh no, I don't breathe enough!" This erroneous belief probably arises partly through the myth that deep breathing is good for you and partly from a feeling of not getting enough oxygen which is what happens if you take in too much air in each breath* as shown here

A serious sign of over breathing is if you sometimes 'forget' to breathe and suddenly take a sharp breath in. This is known as apnoea and commonly happens at night, interrupting the sleep, or in periods of inactivity such as sitting at the computer or watching tv.

There are numerous other signs of over breathing. If you would like to know more about whether you are over breathing see 'Horse Breather' issue 5 – Over breathing signs in people.

You can test your breathing pattern by pausing after the OUT-breath and timing how long it takes before you feel like taking the next breath.

Be aware that this is NOT a breath holding exercise. If your in-breath after the pause is greater than the previous in-breath, you have missed the point at which your body tried to tell you to take the next breath and instead are doing a breath holding exercise. This does not provide the information we are after.

Most people these days feel the need to breathe again after about 10 seconds but for a person to have optimal physiological functioning they would have no desire to take the next breath for at least 45 seconds to a minute. So if your pause is under 45 seconds read on!

To understand how and why over breathing is detrimental to health see the How does it work page on the website;
www.equinebreathing.com

♦A human brain showing a 40% reduction in oxygen after only one minute of **over breathing**.

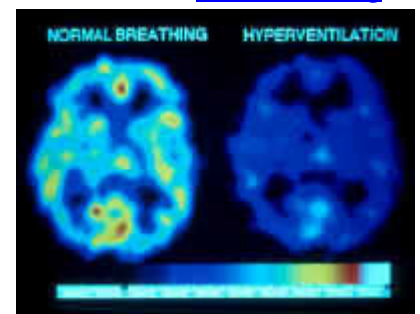


Photo courtesy of Dr P Litchfield

1.Keep your mouth shut and breathe only through your nose*

This advice sounds silly but many people breathe through their mouth, often unknowingly. So if you think that you don't, ask friends or family to watch and let you know if you do.

Breathing through your nose cuts down the volume of air taken into the lungs by two thirds so it's a good way to reduce your breathing especially if you do a lot of mouth breathing.

It's also good in other ways. It cleans the air of dust and germs, and warms and humidifies it as it goes in; then reabsorbs moisture from the air as it is breathed out, reducing water loss and risk of dehydration.

2. Tape your mouth to check if and when you mouth breathe and to break the habit

If you keep your mouth shut with micropore (surgical) tape (when it's practical!) you will soon learn whether and when you try and open your mouth to breathe.

The tape will help you train yourself to the discipline of nose breathing. Once people learn to habitually nose breathe they usually find it most uncomfortable to return to mouth breathing. Mouth breathing is indeed, an unnatural habit, but it can be an insidious one and one that's difficult to break at first so the tape may help.

3. Maintain nose breathing during physical activity

Keeping your mouth shut is particularly helpful during strenuous activity such as riding, grooming, mucking out etc as it helps to maintain aerobic respiration and to delay the onset of anaerobic respiration.

As with any training, you will have to build up gradually. Keeping your mouth shut helps you to control your level of exertion so that you avoid over breathing.

So if you are pushing a heavy wheelbarrow uphill, carrying a hay bale, working in canter etc and feel the need to open your mouth – **don't!** Slow down instead and if necessary stop, and wait until you regain control of your breathing and then resume with your mouth remaining shut.

This discipline makes the exertion a positive force and you will soon increase your fitness until you are able to complete the task without slowing down. You will be less tired because you stay in aerobic respiration. Not getting out of breath eg in a dressage test or when jumping has lots of advantages..., see right >>

Anaerobic respiration is much less efficient, provides less energy, does not produce water (unlike aerobic respiration) and does produce undesirable lactic acid, so avoiding it when possible is beneficial.

*If your nose is blocked there is a simple exercise that you can use at any time to clear it. email me for details;

clare@equinebreathing.com

*"Clare,
For myself, nose breathing has really helped with my anxiety and I believe my overall health. My husband (a nose breather) is making sure he jogs with his mouth closed, and he can really feel the benefits.
Thanks again!
Dianne USA"*

*"... My breathing is better and when long lining and walking the boys briskly I can keep my mouth shut and breathe gently without getting out of breath - big improvement there - I feel calmer and more confident because of this."
Linda UK*

".....and also I tried nose breathing when I went to a dance class at the gym. I was sweaty and hot at the end but when the session was finished my breathing was back to normal almost straight away and I wasn't tired.

Wow!

*thanks for sharing these ideas with us."
Carina Sweden*



If this rider were to keep her mouth shut she would gain many benefits including improved focus and co-ordination, less stress, anxiety and muscle tension and increased stamina

4. Don't talk to your horse!

Put your awareness to your breathing when you talk. Do you take a big gasp at the beginning of a sentence?

For most people, talking involves more over breathing even if the tone is 'soothing'. This is likely to increase adrenaline production and thus tension, and as horses don't comprehend words they are likely to respond to the increased tension.

Whether you are an incessant talker or you tend to shout when things go wrong ("stand still", "woah there" etc), **NOT** talking will help you focus on your body language which is the basis of your relationship with your horse and to remain calm and effective.

Talking can be an ingrained habit, so mouth taping might be helpful here.

So those are tips 1 to 4 which are mostly about nose breathing. Tips 5 to 10 will be given in the next issue of '*Horse Breather*' but in the meantime I hope you will try some of the above tips. Unusual things can happen when you start to improve your breathing. I would love to hear how you get on and will of course be happy to answer any queries.

clare@equinebreathing.com

Till next time
breathe easy
Clare