

Proper Breathing for Running

Like other aspects of our health, breathing is seldom considered...unless it is compromised. This is certainly the case while running.

Since breathing is the means we use to transfer oxygen to all of our body's systems, saying it's "important" is quite an understatement. Improving your breathing mechanics while running is a skill that should be valued by beginners and experienced runners alike. □ The concept of proper breathing while running is straightforward, but requires practice on a daily basis to become second nature. The best breathing technique during running is to breath from the diaphragm. Some call this *yoga breathing* or *belly breathing*. By breathing from the diaphragm, a runner will take deeper breaths, preventing the shallow breathing in the chest that can lead to side stitches.

In addition to preventing side stitches, breathing from the diaphragm is likely to improve performance through a variety of factors. The most obvious advantage to this breathing strategy is the greater volume of oxygen taken in with each respiration, in comparison to shallow chest breathing. Other benefits may include the postural advantages gained by breathing from the belly that will likely improve the stabilization of the spine by engaging its support muscles. □ □To practice the proper breathing technique in running, begin with an exercise at home. Lie on your back and place a large book on your stomach, centered over your belly button. Attempt to raise and lower the book in a consistently gradual manner through fluid breathing. Try to push the book up with each inhale and gradually lower it on the exhale. During training runs, work on spending a portion of the run using this technique in the most natural manner possible. Tim Noakes, in his book "Lore of Running," explains that this may take up to two months to perfect. □ □Breathing is seldom considered a trainable factor in your running, but I challenge you to work on developing breathing from the diaphragm. In future articles, we will discuss other forms of respiratory training.

Long may you run,

Sean Coster

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