

Breathing: three ways that it affects your business life

To celebrate World Breathing Day on Monday, Bridget Rooth shares her tips on how to approach different breathing techniques to alleviate stress, improve general wellbeing and tweak poor posture.

Fact #1 – Reversing poor breathing habits can ease body pain

If you suffer from shoulder, neck pain or headaches, there is a good chance it is linked to poor breathing habits.

You could be overusing your accessory breathing muscles in your chest, shoulders and neck. Your main breathing muscle, the diaphragm, should be doing 90% of the work. When you are under pressure at work, your body's physical reaction to stress is to breathe faster into your upper chest. This 'top breathing' is not only inefficient but overuses the accessory breathing muscles. It causes tension to build up, which can translate into neck and shoulder pain and (stress) headaches.

Break the stress cycle and overuse of your accessory breathing muscles by consciously practising some deep belly breathing whenever you feel tension creeping into your neck and shoulder muscles. A step-by-step guide to deep

belly breathing is offered here.

Don't let unnecessary pain and tension sap the energy that you could otherwise be putting to good use.

Fact #2 – Posture affects breathing and breathing affects posture

If you have a desk-based job, the way you sit at your desk will impact the way you breathe.

A 2017 British Heart Foundation study revealed that British people are sedentary for an average of 67 hours a week. So how are you sitting during those hours?

Your posture (seated or standing) is key to how well you breathe. As well as being the most important breathing muscle, the diaphragm also powers your speech and helps your core stability. When you are hunched over a desk, it's hard for your diaphragm to function effectively and you'll end up overusing your accessory breathing muscles (see above). The diaphragm is a muscle, and muscles need to be used. An under-used diaphragm therefore becomes weak, stabilises your core less well, and can lead to lower back problems – which, guess what? – lead to poor breathing habits and poor posture!

Here's how I'd describe a good seated posture. When you sit down, keep your feet flat on the floor and your spine in a neutral position, supported by your desk chair. Imagine your head atop your spine, as if you were a puppet held up by a string. This naturally balanced posture makes space for better breathing and less tension build-up, which equates to a more comfortable work day at your desk.

Fact #3 – Breath is a natural energy booster

Stress, fatigue, distraction – when you'd usually reach for a stimulant like caffeine, sugar or something stronger to keep you going, try using your breath to boost your energy levels.

Most of us would agree that a walk can be a welcome break when you've been stuck at your desk for too long. Adding some conscious breathing to a walk can clear your mind, lift your mood and give you a sense of connectedness.

I call this 'taking my breath for a walk', and I love the way breathing and

walking become intertwined. Use your steps to help you synchronise your breathing to your walking.

Here's an easy energy booster to try next time you need to up your energy levels.

Walk for a couple of minutes with your arms flowing freely at your sides, your chest open and your eyes straight ahead. Breathe in and out through your nose for the whole exercise.

Set a timer for two minutes. Inhale for 6 to 8 steps and exhale for 4.

Revert to normal walking and breathing for a couple of minutes and start the cycle again.

After 2 to 3 rounds, return to your desk refreshed, revitalised and ready to pick up where you left off.

We breathe on auto-pilot for so much of the time that we don't always realise when our breathing pattern changes due to stress or anxiety. Just making the effort to foster awareness around your breath is a great start to building healthier breathing patterns.

You breathe for life and vitality as much as air. Remember, breath is a wonderful tool that you can use to find calm, clarity, energy and motivation.

So go ahead and give it a try it, it's free!

Bridget Rooth runs training programmes for stressed entrepreneurs and executives on how to manage and mitigate stress so they can thrive. An entrepreneur, trainer, language buff and lifetime adventurer who has worked all over the world, Bridget is now based on the west coast of Norfolk where she runs her wellness company MindSteadyGo.