

## [The Health Series: #1 Breath for Life](#)

[October 17, 2016](#)

I'm pleased to introduce this month's guest Linda Nicholls.

Linda Nicholls DipC, MTC, PhD is a group facilitator who integrates her diverse experiences in programs for those interested in personal transformation and strengthening relational skills. She leads a wide range of programs at [The Haven](#) and internationally.

Linda is here to talk about Breath for Life, the first in this series, and one of the most basic and misunderstood occupations of life.

You can learn more about Linda on her [website](#).

Welcome, Linda!

### **Breath for Life**

You are living your life between inhaling your first breath and exhaling your final breath.

You can live for weeks with no food, days with no water yet only around four minutes with no breath before your brain becomes altered. Experiment with holding your breath while watching a timer and notice how few seconds pass before urgency or even panic sets in!

Depending upon your activity level you are probably taking anywhere from 15,000 to 30,000 breaths per day, every day of your life, approximately 6,000,000 to over 9,000,000 breaths per year. The quality of your breathing has a profound influence on your entire being, physically, emotionally, mentally, psychically, sexually, spiritually.

Flames naturally burn brighter and more intensely when fueled with oxygen. The flow of life force energy within you (Sanskrit *prana*, meaning "vital principle" or in Chinese *chi*, in Polynesian *mana*, in Amerindian *orenda*) is also expanded, enriched and balanced when you learn to consciously breathe deeply and correctly.

I deliberately say learn to breathe correctly because most of us have long forgotten even by the time we enter our teens. When you were very young, even pre-verbal, you were quite likely beginning to unconsciously restrict your natural, healthy breathing capacity in order to control your emotions, your movements and your behavior. Were you told to stop crying, stop laughing or stop wiggling? Maybe you recall sucking in your breath, your lip quivering as you tried to stop crying, or holding your breath until you burst out in laughter? Or maybe you have experienced the other end of the continuum when your breathing becomes shallow and rapid with anxiety and panic – out of control like a runaway team of horses with no driver.

Your breathing is remarkably the only function of your autonomic nervous system that is consciously controllable – providing you with the option to remain unconscious or to awaken and choose to take charge of the team.

What are some of the benefits to learn conscious deep breathing? There are so many, I remain baffled as to why it is often overlooked and underrated!

My proposal is that learning to be in charge of breathing optimally is as important as it is to be responsible for your own quality of life. It is as important as it is to value and honour the earth and the environment that nourishes and sustains your very existence. The substance and matter of your physical body is earth to your unique soul. Breath is the chord that ties your soul to your body, enlivening your personal earth, the unifying force that weaves together your vibrant body and your multidimensional inner being. In many Indo European languages the word for spirit and breath is the same, signifying that breath is the movement of spirit in matter. The Latin roots of the English word “respiration” reflect this ancient knowledge.

Breathing is free, easy, natural, within conscious control. You can do it anywhere, any time without any special equipment!

Breathing optimally provides a natural, beneficial massage to your vital organs increasing their tone and regulating their function. Optimal breathing also enriches the health of your organs, including your brain and your musculoskeletal system by delivering abundant oxygen and nutrients.

There is an intimate connection between proper breathing, sensuality, and sexuality. The effects can be immediate. When consciously breathing it is possible to experience waves of sensual pleasure after just a few breaths, whether alone or with someone else. Breathing techniques are core to tantric and erotic art practices.

When you are restricting your breath, you are restricting your body’s detoxification systems: liver cells, kidney cells, secreting cells in your gut wall, gallbladder, bladder, lymphatics, sweat glands, skin vessels, the cell walls of virtually every body cell. Poor breathing reduces cellular activity and increases toxic buildup. Proper breathing can be a direct, effective method for easily cleansing toxins from your body.

Practicing and developing conscious deep breathing (such as in some forms of meditation) calms your primitive, reactive “snake brain” at the same time as strengthening the Chief Executive Officer of your neo-cortex so that you remain present and grounded in stressful circumstances.

Skillfully facilitated breath work can be powerfully transformational for you if you are experiencing psychosomatic illness or burdened with the impact of unresolved emotional history.

Some people use disciplined conscious deep breathing methods to experience extraordinary states of consciousness.

David Suzuki talks of a thought experiment by Harvard astronomer Harlow Shapely about the inert gas, argon, that is about 1 per cent of the air we breathe. Today, as we breathe in and out, we are breathing in thousands of the same argon atoms that were breathed by Ghandi, Joan of Arc, ancient lovers and poets.

Suzuki refers to air as the matrix that joins all life together. With each breath in we absorb atoms of our forebears, and with each breath out we send our contribution to our future generations.

Breathing binds us with the past and the future through our shared spirit.

To consciously breathe deeply is to say “yes” to life. Many of us are using only a fraction of our breathing potential. Shallow breathing often indicates anxiety and fear and conversely shallow breathing feeds anxiety and fear. Deep robust breathing done properly connects us within our deeper selves, grounding us in our body and in reality, supporting more ease and less fear. The full expansion and contraction of our lungs is symbolic of our flexibility to expand and contract our life in healthy ways.

What I have shared here is a brief overview of a vast and vital topic. My 30+ years of guiding people of all ages and backgrounds through their personal growth, as well as my personal experience, has profoundly influenced my passion and enthusiasm for the amazing gift of breath.

A multitude of breathing methods that have been used throughout the ages lie waiting for your discovery.

“There is one way of breathing that is shameful and constricted. Then there’s another way; a breath of love that takes you all the way to infinity.”- Rumi

Linda Nicholls, DipC, MTC, PhD

October 2016