Breathing patterns while working out

Dear Alice,

I've read a little about breathing patterns when you're working out, but I'd like to know more about it. Is it better to exhale when contracting the muscle, or is it the other way around?

Thanks in advance.

Answer
Dear Reader

How's this for a breath of fresh air: there is no right or wrong pattern to breathing while working out. Although you may often hear people say it's best to exhale during exertion (or as you wrote, contraction) and inhale during relaxation, the most important part is to make sure you're breathing evenly and regularly during exercise.

Many people may think they're breathing while they're working out, but they're actually holding their breath in short bursts. To see if this applies to you, take a few seconds to focus on your breathing next time you're engaged in strenuous exercise, whether it's at the gym, running to catch a bus, or going up a flight of stairs. You may surprise yourself by finding out you're holding your breath most of the time!

It's important to breathe during exercise because your muscles are working hard and use oxygen as their main source of fuel. It's okay to breathe with your mouth, your nose, or both? all of these options are normal and help the body to get oxygen. Relaxing your jaw and keeping your mouth slightly open during exercise will help you breathe normally and naturally without much thought or effort. It is especially important to breathe normally during strength training, such as weightlifting; otherwise, your blood pressure can climb up to dangerous levels.

Also, feel free to breathe easily? as long as you're breathing, the rhythm makes absolutely no difference in your performance. That means that breathing quicker will not make you run faster (and vice versa). If you have asthma, severe allergies, or other respiratory issues, it's important to give extra thought to the types of the activity you're doing and what they mean in terms of management of your health. Finally, pain does not lead to gain, so be sure to stop if you are feeling dizzy, have chest pains, or become severely out of breath.

Enjoy your workout,

Alice!

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