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**T**rust your body it knows what to do, you were born breathing this way. — Dr. Belisa Vranich. Dr. Vranich speaks passionately about the breath, coveting its role in every aspect of human health and performance—oxygen is nutrition for the cells, without it our ecosystem is compromised—everything from longevity to insomnia, cognition to vision, will either flourish or fail under our breath. We all know that to survive we must breathe, but very few of us realize how breathing naturally can help us thrive. In her new book *Breathe*, Dr. Belisa shows us how to tap this forgotten instinct, empowering our body to recover and perform at its best.

“ When I teach ‘Recovery Breath’ to athletes, it’s about oxygenating, lowering cortisol, healing, and pushing that reset button so they can train again effectively tomorrow. ”

### Instructions for Recovery Breath (part one)

This is the area where most new ultrarunners get it wrong. Start with the two-part breath, which is really two inhales. The first inhale fills your belly, the second, the top of your lungs. There’s a very distinct division between the first and the second inhale, and each one should sound slightly different. The first one (which is an LBB) is fuller, as well.

1. Lying on your back, with nothing under your head, put one hand on your belly and one hand on the top of your chest, by your collarbones.
2. Breathe through your mouth. It is a bigger orifice than your nostrils, and the point of this exercise is to get more oxygen into your body and accustom yourself to breathing this way. It may feel peculiar at first, but you will get used to it after the second or third time.
3. The first inhale should make your belly rise; your top hand (on your chest) should not move. Now, without exhaling take another inhale and fill the top of your lungs. This time, your top hand should move. To help you “learn” the breath, move your shoulders back slightly. *Be sure that you are not just transferring air from the bottom to the top.*
4. There should be two distinct inhales, even if the second one is small. It is not one long breath. Your belly should remain full as you add the second “top” breath. The first few times you inhale this way may feel odd. It should; you’ve never breathed like this before.
5. Exhale enthusiastically; it should take the amount of time the two inhales took, not longer. Exhale in one breath, feeling your chest and belly contract.

This first part in Recovery Breath should be hard; it is *exercise* for your breathing muscles. Note that the second inhale will feel smaller, even more constricted. You will probably feel pressure around your collarbones or armpits as you try to fill up this second breath. Some people even experience a “stitch” in their back as they try this new breathing, others a tightness in their necks. The general rule is to try to relax that place and continue inhaling.

### Three Things to Remember

1. Keep breathing through your mouth for the entire first part. You may switch to your nose for the second part.
2. Find a rhythm that suits you, and stick to it. You should be able to find or “drop down” into this rhythm with more ease each time.
3. No matter what happens, just encourage yourself calmly and firmly to continue breathing. Any peculiar or uncomfortable sensations will lessen each time you practice, and the benefits are priceless.

Understand that you may hit a wall. Some people hit it after twenty breaths, others significantly later. In fact, the first few times you practice this active meditation you will hit the same kind of wall that you do when you work out. You will hear yourself make excuses about why you want to stop. Treat this feeling just as you do any other time you don’t want to continue doing something but you have to. If you feel a little tingling, that’s okay! Just encourage yourself to keep going, and remind yourself you are doing well and are almost done. Believe that there will be a moment when you get “to the other side,” and just keep moving to the pace of your breath. It won’t be like trudging uphill anymore.

### Recovery *the* Inner Game

Whether it’s a jolt of happiness as the ball makes it in, or literally a kick in the head from an opponent, bursts of energy can be extreme and can negatively affect your judgment if not controlled. “Bad” breathing can exacerbate this. Breathing, then, is the ultimate way to keep that adrenaline in balance: you want to be *calm and alert*. Unfortunately, fluctuations in energy and emotion can become a potentially dangerous enemy, hurting your peripheral vision and warping your time perception.

**Practice adversity.** Yes, practice; don’t assume that you’ll know what to do when you need to calm yourself quickly. In my Breathing for Warriors class, I make participants practice getting revved up and then calming down, until it becomes a mastered skill.

## Instructions for Recovery Breath (part two)

1. Move your hands away from your body. Put your arms at your sides, palms up. Point your toes outward. You may keep breathing through your mouth or switch to your nose. Relax your lips, your face, your palate (the roof of your mouth). Let your tongue get heavy. Very Important: Let your jaw relax. All of your body takes cues from your jaw. Pay attention to your cheeks, ears, and neck, relaxing them with each exhale. Relax your shoulders and your whole body—all the way to the tips of your fingers.

2. Continue doing mental body scans from time to time to make sure you are not holding tension anywhere. You may be surprised to discover that you may have a place that is always tensed, so much so that you have become accustomed to it. Be aware that with each inhale you are letting yourself float a little higher, and with each exhale you are letting yourself sink a little deeper. Try to move your mind away from thinking; simply keep your attention on your physical sensations. By “keep your attention on” I mean observe your body breathe as if you were watching another person. Recovery Breath involves active participation, and is immediately rewarding. It is a “two-for the price-of one” bargain: a brief but highly effective exercise that helps you recover from one day to the next, a form of active meditation for people who “can’t meditate.”

Relaxing your body so that stress hormones and blood pressure decrease recharges your battery within minutes and encourages mindfulness. It protects you against the effects of prolonged stress by giving your body the oxygen and relaxation it needs to recover. In addition, Recovery Breath is a breathing exercise you can taper to meet your needs and level of enthusiasm.

In sum, Recovery Breath is a “reset” that will give your immune system a boost, keep your cortisol and blood pressure down, and oxygenate your body so that oxidative stress doesn’t age you before your time. Do it as often as possible, ideally every day.

## Five Game Changing Exercises for Athletes

1. Exhale when exerting energy. The exhale will help strengthen whatever you’re propelling, be it a fist or a baseball, or a weight when bench-pressing. *Homework:* You may think you’re exhaling, but check how often you’re really holding your breath. Practice integrating the breath into movement—this will help with the strength of the movement and its fluidity.

2. Face your enemies. Your worst enemy is “perceived fatigue.” Crushing this opponent is possible by working out your breathing muscles diligently. *Homework:* How often do you wonder why you’re lacking focus, energy, or motivation? Check yourself. It may be your breathing is off (rather than being lazy or lacking passion).

3. Breathe horizontally. Your second worst enemy is adrenaline or an erratic amount of “gas.” Breathing vertically causes this. (Remember: Oxygen is used by the cells to release energy from the body’s energy stores.) *Homework:* Check your shoulders. Sure, on a bigger breath, there’s going to be some movement; however, your shoulders shouldn’t be your inhale muscles exclusively. Consciously taking a Lower-body Breath is giving you a significantly bigger breath, and neurologically, a calming one.

4. Exhale: Troubleshoot hyperventilating. All too often, people brace when they’re in competitive situations, which can lead to over-breathing/ hyperventilating afterward. *Homework:* In place of “breathe,” tell yourself to “exhale.”

5. If your sport relies on precision, learn to recognize and expand the stillness in the last second of the exhale. In precision sports like archery, golf, or shooting, if you don’t replicate the breath exactly with your “pre-shot routine,” you’re leaving a big factor to chance, which can make for infuriating inconsistencies. *Homework:* When doing the Recovery Breathing meditation, bring attention to the stillness that you feel between breaths.

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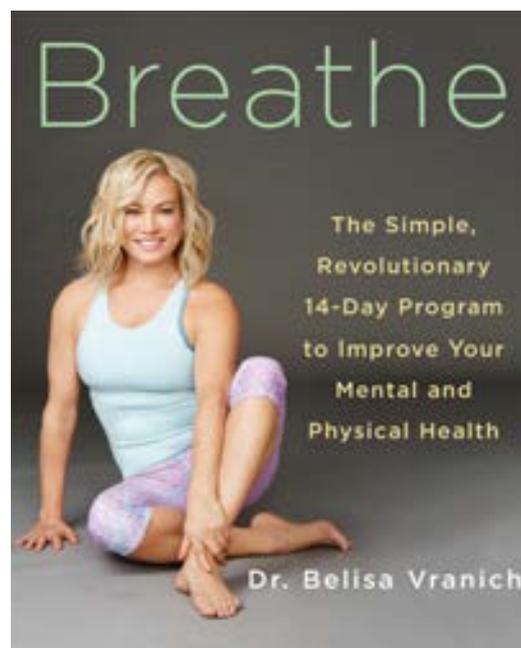
Dr. Belisa Vranich is a renowned clinical psychologist, public speaker, and founder of The Breathing Class™, teaching people to breathe in an anatomically congruous way that maximizes balanced inhales and exhales. This article is from her new book *Breathe: The Simple, Revolutionary 14-Day Program to Improve your Mental and Physical Health* (St. Martin’s Press 2016). [thebreathingclass.com](http://thebreathingclass.com)

## BREATHE

*Belisa Vranich, St. Martins 2016*

Contemporary science confirms what generations of healers have observed through centuries of practice: Breath awareness can turn on the body's natural abilities to prevent and cure illness. The mental and physical stresses of modern life, such as anxiety, frustration, sexual dysfunction, insomnia, high blood pressure, digestive woes, and immune dysfunction can all be addressed through conscious control of your breath. In addition, it can increase energy, accelerate healing, improve cognitive skills, and enhance mental balance. Yet most of us stopped breathing in the anatomically "right" way, the way to take advantage of these benefits, when we were four or five years old. Dr. Vranich shows readers how to turn back the tide of stress and illness, and improve the overall quality of their life through a daily breathing workout. In a fascinating, jargon-free exploration of how our bodies were meant to breathe, Dr. Belisa Vranich delves into the ins and outs of proper breathing. By combining both anatomy and fitness with psychology and mindfulness, Dr. Vranich gives readers a way of solving health problems at the crux and healing themselves from the inside out.

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## HEAL YOUR PAIN NOW

*Joe Tatta, Da Capo 2017*

In *Heal Your Pain Now*, Dr. Joe Tatta teaches you how to regain control of your life by breaking the cycle of persistent pain. Following Dr. Tatta's program, you learn the role of the brain in pain—and how to use your brain to STOP your pain; how nutrition can eliminate the inflammation in your body, which is exacerbating your pain; and how to overcome Sedentary Syndrome and choose the best movement strategy. Dr. Tatta provides quizzes, self-assessments, meal plans, shopping lists, recipes, and exercises to support you throughout the program. If you struggle with chronic pain from an injury, autoimmune disease, or musculoskeletal pain—or are overweight and have tried everything without success—*Heal Your Pain Now* provides natural solutions to finally eliminate your pain and return to an active, healthy, and fulfilling life.

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