Most Runners Breathe WRONG—Fix It in 5 Steps

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[00:00:00] Think about this. You've been running for a few weeks, months, or years. No one has ever really taught you how to breathe. In the late nineties when I started running, I was out there gasping for air through races, wondering why my legs were strong, but I still felt like I was dying 20% into the races. The advice back then, breathe deep into the nose.

[00:00:21] Out through the mouth, useless trash. It wasn't a fitness problem, it was a breathing problem, and once I fixed that, things got so much easier. So here are five breathing hacks that I've used personally that will transform your running without stealing more of your time. In this episode, you're gonna learn why nose breathing is low key, the best upgrade that you might be ignoring.

[00:00:41] How to stop panic breathing. With one uncomfortable drill while your exhale probably sucks, pun intended, and how breathing links to recovery and consistency so that you can train more without blowing up all with science to back it up. I'm Daren D Lake. 30 years ago I was a sprinter, but now distance coach and I helped self-coach runners get faster and stay consistent.

[00:01:00] I've tested all this breathing stuff and it helped me run a sub hour marathon and complete a 10 hour Ironman. But now my goal is to show 10,000 runners just like you, how to train their lungs. Not just their legs. Let's get into the episode. Nose versus mouth equals, stop using the emergency exit all the time.

[00:01:16] Alright, here's the thing. Your nose is designed for breathing. Your mouth is designed for talking, eating, and gasping for air. When you're panicking, most runners, they flip that, they mouth breathe through every run. Easy, hard, doesn't. And then wonder why it feels harder than it should. Andrew Huberman on the Lex Friedman podcast said it best.

[00:01:33] There's so much out there about breath work and how to breathe and all this stuff, but no one talks about how to do it in real time. Mm-hmm. While you're exerting effort. Exactly. Nose equals control mouth equals the backup plan. Quick run science nerd break. A 2018 study found that runners who train with only nasal breathing for six plus months dropped their breathing rate from 49 to 39 breaths per minute.

[00:01:54] They also had higher CO2 carbon dioxide in the air that they exhaled AK more efficiency without losing performance, so they didn't go any slower. A quick analogy is to think of nose breathing like a Toyota Prius. It's a hybrid electric car. Mouth breathing is your redlining. Sports car, Ferrari, Lambo, whatever you wanna call it.

[00:02:13] Both work. One's sustainable, one's fun, but the fun sports car will burn out if you overuse it. So how do you do this? Nose breathing. So simple. On your next easy run, go 10 minutes. Breathing only through your nose. Make sure it's an easy run. If you have to slow down, that's good. That means you're in zone two or possibly even zone one, if you can run that slow.

[00:02:32] That's where the gains happen in the long term though, and that's how you build aerobic base. If you're always in turbo mouth breathing mode, your system is absolutely fried and it's time to reboot the engine. So to reboot that engine and fix that fried system, you can do that with my free breathing and base training plan bundle.

[00:02:50] It's how I learned to run easier with less effort. I'm giving it to you again for free. It takes two minutes or less to download, probably a minute, but worth two decades of trial and error. You'll also sign up for my email newsletter. Get it at the QR code here. Link below or in your show notes. Let's get back into the episode.

[00:03:06] Cool. So we know how to nose, breathe and train easy, but what about when effort spikes and your lungs start to freak out? Breath holds equal. Teach your lungs to chill out. This next one I thought was kind of stupid and kind of weird until it worked. Breath holds not fancy. Wim H stuff, which is for another day.

[00:03:22] Just holding your breath after an exhale while running. That's it. Why is it good? Because high CO2 carbon dioxide in your body, not low oxygen is what makes you panic. So if you train your body to tolerate more CO2, again carbon dioxide, you stay calmer. Longer, quick run science nerve break. A 2024 study showed that brief breath holding drills improve respiratory and muscle strength and made hard efforts feel easier.

[00:03:46] And yes, it's kind of weird at first, but that's the point. And Andrew Huberman backs it up. He says, breath holds boost heart rate variability, A-K-A-H-R-V, and it resets your nervous system and give you more control over your own physiology. So a breath hold. After you exhale, super easy, so you exhale. And you just hold it.

[00:04:05] That's it. Pretty simple. That's during the run. Now let's fix what happens after your run. You know, when people take cold showers or do cold plunges to train mental toughness, it's kind of like that, but it's for your lungs. So this is how you do it during the end of your run strides. Try three to five.

[00:04:20] Second breath holds after an exhale. Do four of them. You can do them at the end of a run. Just make sure it's in a controlled setting, not in the middle of somewhere where you can pass out caution build into them. So just start with one or two first and the next. Run two or three. Build into three to five.

[00:04:35] Don't be a hero. We don't want you to pass out. Okay, so you're calm now from all these breathing techniques, but how do you turn that into rhythm? Match your breath to your stride. Here's a fix. Almost no one uses, but it works instantly. So you inhale for three steps and exhale for two on easy runs, hard runs into out two, or whatever feels balanced.

[00:04:56] It's all about balance. It's not about getting this perfectly right. So if you're running, it'll be 1, 2, 3, and be inhale, and then one, two, exhale. So big.

[00:05:08] You don't have to do that exaggerated. You can do that more smooth. Why this works. Some runners breathe like a horse galloping or drunk drummer. It's offbeat and their body knows it's wrong. Your body loves rhythm. When you sink your breath to your steps, everything clicks. It's like switching from shuffle mode on your music player to a good playlist on repeat.

[00:05:27] So you got rhythm Now. But are you even using your full lungs breathing? Tip number four, full exhale. Get the junk out. So most people don't breathe out all the way. They kind of sip air in. Like if you're just sipping a drink and only halfway push it out, that leaves stale air stuck in your lungs. Again, carbon dioxide buildup, which means the next breath.

[00:05:46] It sucks. Literally Nicholas Rosner, big YouTuber running account. Shout out he did a dope episode, breaking all this stuff down. But here's a shortcut. You can check that out up there or below. Mid run, purse your lips and exhale like you're fogging up a mirror. Slow controlled. Feel your abs fire. That's your diaphragm working the way it should.

[00:06:05] So this is how I do it. You need to feel the abs on fire. So again, making sure your lips are exhaling out like you're fogging up a mirror. And you wanna feel it in your diaphragm. It all exit the air out again,

[00:06:26] and you feel that while running, it's a bit difficult to make sure you practice that. Breathe to recover, stay in the game longer. You don't get faster from workouts. You get faster from breaking yourself down and recovering between them. Your breathing and your heart rate and your brain are in this really remarkable interplay.

[00:06:42] It goes like this when you inhale. This isn't breath work. We're not gonna do breath work, but when you inhale, the diaphragm moves down. The, the heart gets a little bigger 'cause there's a little more space in the thoracic cavity. And as a consequence, blood flows a little bit more slowly through that larger volume.

[00:06:58] Mm-hmm. And there's a category of neurons, the Cy atrial node that sees that, that recognizes that. That slower rate through that larger volume sends a signal to the brainstem, and the brainstem sends a signal back to the heart to speed the heart up. Mm-hmm. So every time you inhale, you're in speeding the heart up.

[00:07:14] When you exhale, the diaphragm moves up, the heart gets a little smaller, the volume is smaller, blood flows more quickly through the heart more. Signal sent up to the brain and the brain sends a signal back to slow the heart down. This is the basis of heart rate variability. So at any point if you feel like your heart is racing and you feel like you're working too hard per unit of effort, focus on making your exhales longer.

[00:07:38] Or more intense than your inhales. Again, training is work plus rest, not work plus work. Gotta have that recovery in there and breathing is one of the best

ways to recover faster and train more often, which is what we want. In my upcoming book, the 1% Better Runner, I talk about this concept a lot, consistency.

[00:07:54] It's not just showing up, it's showing up again and again and again. With excitement, with energy, the ability to do your best work, that's consistency. A 2023 Stanford study showed that five minutes of daily cyclic, sighing, double inhale, slow inhale, beat out mindfulness meditation for lowering stress and improving mood.

[00:08:16] HRV. Again, heart rate variability. It didn't skyrocket, but the recovery signals were clear. So how to do it after you're running before bed, breathe in through your nose and then take a small second snip. So you wanna go? So basically you fill your lungs up all the way, and then you fill your lungs up a hundred percent.

[00:08:31] So it gets to 90% and then a hundred percent and then long slow exhale through your mouth. Do that for five minutes. That's your nervous system, cooling down with your body. You may get a bit dizzy, so maybe start out with two to three minutes, I found. 'cause your body has to get used to it. Your brain and all that doesn't like breathing a lot.

[00:08:46] And then exhaling that double inhale. Exhale is pretty rough on you, but there are a lot of gains that happen from it. Okay. So what do you do with all of this if you haven't already, put this into practice by getting the breathing bundle and base training plan. Again, it's free. If you wanna breathe better, run smoother, and actually enjoy your training.

[00:09:03] This is the move, and while you're at it, you'll sign up for free automatically for my email newsletter. It's five minutes or less. Every week drops in your email inbox. I got deep dives on stuff like VO two max threshold Temple runs, mental fitness run form, and a bit of fun sprinkled in there. 'cause running it should be fun.

[00:09:21] So these five breathing tweaks, that's your entry point, but if you really wanna run faster, you need to master running slower through your nose. I did a full deep dive on nose versus mouth breathing, so make sure you watch that right here or in the show notes or video description below. Pace.