

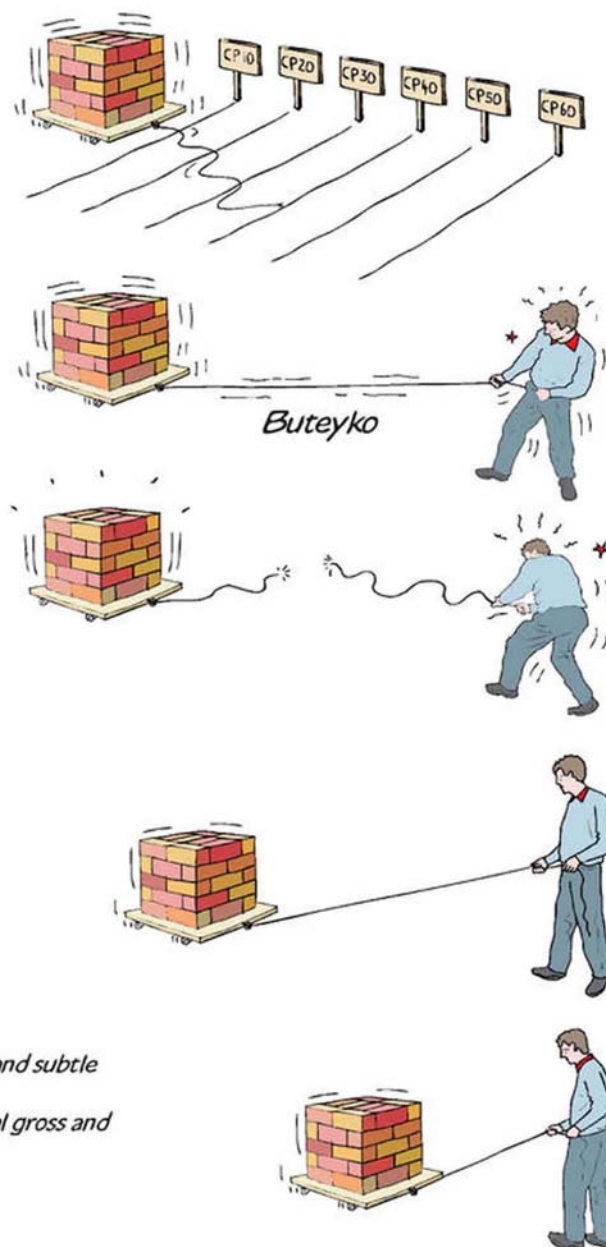
Breath of Life



Buteyko Breathing Educators Association

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Rehabilitation of breathing is like moving a pile of bricks with a string. It requires effort, persistence and care not to break the string.



Persistent but sensitive and subtle practice will be more successful than occasional gross and extreme application.

Victor Hum-Rochette 2011



Yoga and stretching for asthmatics

Pippa Kiraly

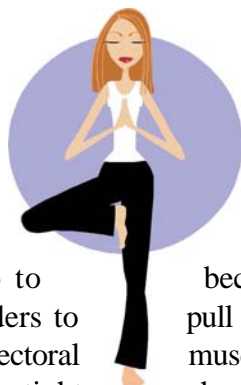
We are always told it's wise to stretch out after strenuous exercise to counterpose for the muscles we have just been working hard.

An asthma attack is very strenuous exercise, even a continuous wheeze is strenuous exercise, but no one has ever suggested that we do other exercises to loosen up the muscles we use in asthma.

That's where yoga comes in.

As a child, my mother massaged my aching ribs, that is, the intercostal muscles, after an asthma attack.

Over time, the intercostal muscles of chronic asthmatics become very tight. Using the upper chest causes auxiliary breathing muscles also to become tight, causing the shoulders to pull inwards because of tight pectoral muscles and to hunch up, thanks to tight shoulder muscles, while the neck muscles become prominent ropes. At the same time the lateral muscles also tighten up making it hard to twist around in a seat. With the neck so tight the head won't turn easily, it gets hard to be able to glance over the left shoulder when driving.



When asthmatics learn Buteyko, they begin to learn to use a previously rigid diaphragm again, and to relax the smooth muscle around the airways. However, while they may be able to breathe more easily, their lungs and torso are still encased in what feels like a straitjacket of overworked, understretched muscles.



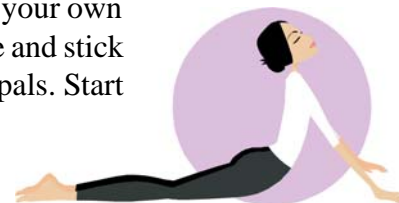
That is where exercise like yoga can be very helpful, particularly in combination with massage. Gentle yoga will show a person where their muscles are tightest, and that person can then go to a massage therapist and request work in that area.. It's an ongoing regime. Weekly yoga helps

the massage therapist know where to work first, and the massage helps the person to be able to move more easily in yoga poses.

I'm not talking here about the extreme forms of yoga, such as Ashtanga or Bikram yoga. Hatha and excellent and Viniyoga, a form of Iyengar, is even better, as it works with the torso muscles more than most forms of yoga, but any slow form of yoga would help. It should be a class where the teacher gives individual monitoring to make sure poses are being done correctly.



However, yoga breathing as it is taught in this country, is in many cases not helpful. Please, if you go to a yoga class, tell the teacher you will be doing your own breathing exercise and stick to Buteyko principals. Start off with reduced breathing during the opening meditation, and keep it quiet throughout the class, mouth shut, no holds on an inbreath. I guarantee you will feel wonderful at the end.



Like Buteyko, this is not a quick fix. Alternating yoga and massage each week for a few years will make a huge difference to most asthmatics. I know, I've done it.

An addendum to this: Many asthmatics are on steroid medications, and one of the long term side effects of these is osteoporosis. I'd suggest every asthmatic on steroids should be doing exercise such as yoga to help strengthen muscles and keep bones strong.

