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Basic Breathing

Breathing is controlled instinctively by the deep centers of the brain, but we learn to interfere with it through bad habit patterns. The aim of Qigong breathing is to restore the natural pattern of instinctive breathing by letting go of interfering habits.

You can do this exercise sitting, standing or lying. Sitting is best. So start by sitting comfortably, spine long, resilient and straight. First, just notice the movement of your breath just as it is, with no effort to control or correct it. Where do you feel it? Chest, stomach, belly, back, sides? Is it fast or slow? Deep or shallow? Smooth or rough? What happens as you just observe it without interfering?

Now pay attention gently to the exhale. Do you allow the exhale to complete itself, or do you unconsciously stop it before the end? What happens if you allow the exhale to happen completely? (Don't push it out!)

Perhaps you start to notice that the exhale prolongs itself a bit; and as it does so, the next inhale is a little fuller. Don't force it! Don't try to pull in a big breath! This just creates tension. Let go of the inhale; find that little natural pause at the end of the exhale. Notice that if you rest into that pause, the new inhale comes spontaneously, and fills you from below upwards. You start to feel the breath more in your belly, perhaps in your back and the sides of your ribs, and less in your upper chest and shoulders.

Continue to let go more and more, and gradually the instinctive brain centers take control. The breath, over time, becomes longer, deeper, smoother, subtler, and more powerful, like a vast tide moving slowly through you.

The more the breath activates the belly, lower back and sides of the ribs, the more the neck, shoulders and upper chest can let go and soften, and the more the nervous system comes into balance.