

# How to Breathe Like an Aquatic Ape

*A Profound Practice for Resilient Health and Happiness*

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## Introduction

Why aren't we breathing naturally? All wild apes instinctively breathe deeply and continuously, yet so many domesticated humans tend to breathe in a shallow manner and even subconsciously hold our breath while focusing on other things. One key reason is that most of us have become dependent on speaking symbolic languages, which involves both breath suppression and habitual analytical thinking. This increases blood flow to the outer part of brain, where symbols are interpreted, and reduces blood flow to the inner brain, where automatic functions like breathing are regulated. As a result of shallow breathing, we consume less oxygen and eliminate less carbon, so our cells and fluids are more acidic. Acidosis is the common denominator of virtually all dis-ease. Practicing meditation and conscious breathing has direct health benefits, and we can retrain ourselves to breathe more naturally.

Among all the great apes, humans have the unique ability to consciously hold our breath and we're the only ones with written language. Other apes use simple verbal communication in the wild, but the sounds are compatible with continuous breathing and not coded into visual

symbols for reading and writing. In captivity, other apes are able to communicate thousands of words and complex ideas using sign language, yet they are unable to articulate even basic words verbally. Did our unique ability to suppress our breath arise from a need for more complex communication, or was there another impetus, such as a need for better swimming abilities?

Despite decades of resistance in the scientific establishment, there is now growing consensus that the first bipedal humans did not live in the dry savannah of Africa, but rather in the wetlands around the Nile river basin and Fertile Crescent. This is supported by both archeological evidence and our anatomy. According to the aquatic ape theory, we gradually became bipedal by frequently dropping out of trees and wading across bodies of water, evolving from arboreal to semi-aquatic and semi-terrestrial apes. On the rare occasions when other great apes wade in water, they all walk bipedally with their hands above the surface.

Humans have many aquatic adaptations that make us unique among the apes. Our body hairs are much shorter and finer for less resistance in the water (although the density of our “fur” is about the same as that of other apes). We have an extra layer of fat or blubber under our skin (which no other apes have) to keep us warm in cold water. Our babies are born with extra fat for buoyancy while they learn to swim, and we only have long hairs on our head, presumably for infants to hold on to (as all other ape babies cling to the fur of their mother before walking on their own). It stands to reason that humans have evolved to breathe deeply, as all arboreal and terrestrial animals do, and also to hold our breath for long periods of time, as all aquatic mammals do.

By retraining ourselves to breathe more fully and continuously, and to only hold our breath when we consciously choose to, we can profoundly regenerate our natural health and happiness. This breathing exercise was inspired by the aquatic ape theory and a remarkable ape known as Wim Hof or “the Iceman”. His method of Tibetan *tummo* (which means “inner fire”) has helped many people with myriad health conditions, from depression and anxiety to cancer and heart disease, from neurological disorders to autoimmune diseases, and many more. Now that you have a basic understanding of the evolutionary forces at work behind this technique, let’s get into the practice.

## **Overview**

This breathing exercise includes three stages. The first, *oxygenation*, involves breathing deeply and continuously (as wild apes do) at a faster pace than usual. This will saturate the cells and blood with oxygen, increase the alkalinity of the body, produce dopamine and serotonin, and help release physical tension and emotional traumas stored in the cellular memory. The second stage, *retention*, involves holding the breath out with lungs empty as long as comfortably possible (as marine mammals do). This will use up most of the oxygen and produce epinephrine, which reduces pain and inflammation, regulates the immune response, and provides many other benefits. The third stage, *recovery*, involves inhaling deeply, holding it briefly with the hands overhead, and squeezing the diaphragm against the full lungs to direct blood flow into the head. This dilates the blood vessels in the brain, increasing the uptake of fresh oxygen and the hormones released during the first two stages.

## Preparation

Find a place where there is optimal air to breathe and minimal distractions like other people, phones, computers, or pets, ideally in nature. Begin in a comfortable position lying down on your back, with knee support, or sitting with the legs crossed, in half lotus, or in a flat chair. You can also try squatting, but that may get too difficult after a few minutes. It's important that the spine is relaxed and in good alignment. Once you have practiced and feel comfortable with the technique, begin practicing it in the coldest water you can find, sitting or standing while nearly submerged with your head above the surface, or in a cold shower.

### 1. Oxygenation

As you breathe, imagine a balloon situated at the base of your spine, that expands to fill your entire body from head to fingers and toes. If your nasal cavity is open on both sides, inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. If it is at all congested or restricted, leave your mouth open so you can fill your lungs quickly. The only effort is on the inhalation; the exhalation is an effortless release.

Keeping the body as relaxed as possible (without engaging the shoulders), inhale until your lungs are full, almost at 100% capacity (only engaging the diaphragm and muscles of the rib cage). Without pausing at the top, immediately exhale until your lungs are around 50% full (without effort, however much air wants to come out naturally). Without pausing at the bottom, return to the inhale. Repeat continuously with a 2:1 rhythm, inhaling for 2 seconds until full and exhaling for 1 second until half-full. You might need to start twice as slow, or you might feel comfortable going twice as fast. The key is that you keep stretching your lung capacity with each inhale and that you go fast enough to consistently take in more oxygen than your body is using. This is not to be confused with hyperventilating as one would do in a state of panic; this is conscious, peaceful, deep, and rhythmic breathing.

Continue until you feel light-headed and euphoric, with a buzzing or tingling sensation in your hands and face. This is caused by alkalosis from high levels of oxygen in the cells and blood, activating the autonomic nervous system, and triggering the adrenal glands to release dopamine and serotonin into the blood. This also redirects the blood flow from the surface of the brain (the neocortex) into the brain stem, cerebellum, and endocrine glands (pituitary, hypothalamus, amygdala, and pineal). You will likely experience these sensations within 30 breaths, but depending on how deeply and rapidly you breathe, you might get there in more or less. Once you feel the buzzing, move on to the retention stage.

### 2. Retention

Exhale all the air out, squeezing with your diaphragm and abs at the end. Close the throat to prevent inhalation, relax the body, and enter meditation. Wait until you feel jolts of energy up and down the spine. This energy is known as *qi* in Chinese, *prana* in Hindi, or *tummo* in Tibetan (meaning "inner fire"). This is your autonomic nervous system triggering the release

of epinephrine (adrenaline) and norepinephrine (noradrenaline), natural medicinal hormones that suppress the production of cytokine (the neurotransmitter that signals pain or cold) and send a cascade of other healing hormones into the blood. When you think you cannot hold out any longer, you might notice that the intense urge to inhale will dissipate and can indeed hold out longer. You are invited to explore this limit and test your comfort zone. If you catch yourself subconsciously starting to inhale before you decide to, simply push the air back out and continue holding, staying focused with a quiet mind and relaxed body.

### **3. Recovery**

When you finally choose to inhale, quickly take a deep breath, close the esophagus, squeeze the diaphragm against the lungs (as if trying to exhale) such that blood accumulates in the head and your face turns red. Raise your arms above your head for additional pressure. This will dilate the blood vessels in the brain and sense organs, increasing the uptake of oxygen, hormones, and steroids that are circulating. After fifteen seconds, exhale gently and immediately begin the next cycle.

### **Frequency & Variations**

Three cycles in a row will take less than 15 minutes for most practitioners. Try starting with two sets of three cycles per day, and in cold water whenever convenient, and notice how quickly your lung capacity, oxygen efficiency, and cold tolerance increase. Over time, you will find yourself breathing more deeply and consistently throughout the day and feeling healthier and stronger every day. As you become more experienced, try this method while you are standing or exercising. Notice how much shorter the retentions are, and how much faster of a pace is necessary to fully oxygenate the blood when the demand for oxygen is higher.

You may also wish to practice the oxygenation phase by itself for a longer period of time (anywhere from 20 minutes to a couple hours) and experience what it is like when the entire body is vibrating with prana. It is common that deep emotions and thoughts may arise while in this state. Sweating and crying are good indications that you are healing old traumas. Rather than analyzing the thoughts or feelings that arise, simply keep your focus in the present moment. Listen to the sound and rhythm of your breath and pay attention to all the sensations in the body. Give yourself plenty of time to integrate the experience and compose yourself before resuming life as usual.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for taking the time to breathe like an ape! If you want to share about your experience or recommend it to friends, please include a link to [ApeLiving.com](https://ApeLiving.com), tag @ApeLiving on social media, and let people know *this PDF is a free gift for subscribing to our newsletter*. For more information about the aquatic ape theory and breathing techniques, please visit our Resources page and stay tuned for new articles and videos on this topic.