

THE BIG IDEAS

#1 Rule of Breathing

Breathe thru your nose!

Attention to Your Breath

2 key benefits.

CO₂

Is your friend.

Mind Gardening

How're you doing with that?

Super Weird Right Arm

Is like your mind.

Rat Poison

Quit the nibbling!

When to Connect

Pretty much all the time.

Anxiety Free

Stop Worrying and Quieten Your Mind

BY PATRICK MCKEOWN · BUTEYKO BOOKS © 2010 · 240 PAGES

"This book is for any person who wishes to have clearer functioning of his or her mind and not be bogged down with useless thinking. Within three weeks the result will be more control over thoughts, better concentration, more energy, more joy, happiness, and appreciation for life. This is a simple and straightforward self-help book approached from two different and yet related perspectives.

The first is about correcting breathing volume using a physician-developed program known as the Buteyko Breathing Method. Chronic overbreathing is a habit present with any person who experiences stress, anxiety, panic attacks and depression. It causes both a constriction of blood vessels and reduced delivery of oxygen to tissues and organs, most notable the brain. The Buteyko Method is a simple approach that significantly improves oxygenation of the brain, resulting in far less brain cell excitability.

The second aspect deals with recognizing the activity of the mind, the nature of thought and how to step out of thought. This too is essential to understanding your mind and taking control."

~ Patrick McKeown from *Anxiety Free*

I really enjoyed Patrick McKeown's great book *The Oxygen Advantage* ([see Notes](#)) where he introduces us to the healing power of optimal breathing. So, when I was preparing for our class on [Conquering Anxiety 101](#) I decided to pick up this little book as well.

I'm glad I did. It's a quick-reading, simple, practical guide to, as the sub-title suggests, "Stop Worrying and Quieten Your Mind—Featuring the Buteyko Breathing Method and Mindfulness."

If you're looking for a general introduction to the power of Oxygen, I'd recommend you go with Patrick's more recent and more all-purpose *Oxygen Advantage*. If you suffer from anxiety and/or panic attacks, this might be a great place to start. (Get the book [here](#).)

(As I briefly glanced at the reviews on Amazon, I was touched by the most recent review which perfectly captures the potential value of this book if you suffer from anxiety: "I have been suffering with air hunger, anxiety, and panic for 4 years. Just applying the breathing exercises this afternoon I already notice a difference. I can't wait to feel the long-term effects of the breathing and mindfulness practices.")

The book is part introduction to the Buteyko Breathing Method and how it can be applied to address anxiety and part essays on mindfulness. It's packed with Big Ideas. I'm excited to share a some of my favorites on both breathing and mindfulness so let's jump straight in!

REMEMBER THE #1 RULE OF BREATHING?

"All of your breathing should only be through your nose. Do not breathe through your mouth.

"The calmer and quieter you breathe, the larger your blood vessels open, enabling better circulation and distribution of oxygen throughout the body, including the brain. Oxygenate the brain-breathe less."

~ Patrick McKeown

"Thinking for practical purposes is fine, as it serves a function. However... most thinking is spent on insane repetitive worry and anxiety. If you could eliminate your repetitive thought activity by 50%, you would be very happy indeed. If you could eliminate all repetitive and useless thinking, you would live a life of bliss."

~ Patrick McKeown

Nature has provided you with a wonderful instrument, our nose, to help make our breathing more regular, filter incoming air and help retain moisture in the body. Many humans sleep, walk, rest and work with their mouths open, as if there nose is nothing more than an ornament!

Mouth breathing generates chaotic and upper chest breathing that stimulates the sympathetic nervous system. On the other hand, nasal breathing and correct posture help promote regular and diaphragmatic breathing, thus generating calmness. Just watch a healthy baby breathe for an example of good breathing."

As we discussed in [The Oxygen Advantage](#) and [Effortless Healing](#), Rule #1 of good breathing: BREATHE THROUGH YOUR NOSE.

All the time.

Unless you want to stimulate your fight-or-flight response and feel anxious. Then, definitely breathe through your mouth. :o

Quick check in: Do you breathe through your nose or your mouth?

Make the switch. Use that beautiful nose of yours the way nature intended. :)

2 KEY BENEFITS OF BRINGING ATTENTION TO YOUR BREATH

"In addition to improved oxygenation, each time you bring your attention back to your breath you are helping to tame your mind. You are dissolving your thought patterns and the more you watch your breath throughout the day, the more frequently your thought activity subsides and stillness takes over."

There are two primary reasons why bringing our attention back to our breath is so powerful.

#1. We breathe properly (gently through our nose, into our diaphragm) and therefore improve the oxygenation of our brain and bodies.

#2. We tame our minds. As we discussed in [Rapt](#), your brain can't focus on two things at once. (Technical science-speak phrase for this fact is "the selective mechanism of biased competition.") So, if you are focused on your breath, you are NOT able to keep looping the same thought over and over again in your mind.

That's a winning combination. It's why *all* the great teachers constantly tell us to use our breath as a pathway to calm confidence.

Next time you find yourself spinning in thoughts see if you can step back, notice your breath, optimize it and create some needed stillness.

P.S. Here's something else to think about: "Anger, anxiety and stress originate from chaotic and fast breathing. In Japan, children are taught from a young age to diaphragmatically breathe and keep their breathing calm when they get angry. When you are under stress, immediately pay attention to your breathing. If you keep your breathing level, calm and quiet, stress will not manifest. Stress and anger require heavy and irregular breathing. To observe this, watch your breathing the next time you get stressed or angry."

CO₂ IS YOUR FRIEND

"There are only two ways to increase CO₂ in the human organism. The first is to reduce breathing volume and the second is to produce more CO₂ by engaging in physical exercise. CO₂ is generated through inner respiration from the process of converting food and oxygen into energy. An exercising muscle generates more CO₂, thus encouraging the release of oxygen from haemoglobin to that muscle. Remember that the presence of CO₂ loosens the bond between oxygen and haemoglobin within red blood cells."

"Remember that when you mouth breathe for periods of time, you are reducing oxygenation of your brain."

~ Patrick McKeown

In *The Oxygen Advantage*, we talked about just how powerful CO₂ is if we want to optimally deliver oxygen to our brain and cells.

Let's review: "The crucial point to remember is that hemoglobin releases oxygen when in the presence of carbon dioxide. When we overbreathe, too much carbon dioxide is washed from the lungs, blood, tissues, and cells. This condition is called hypocapnia, causing the hemoglobin to hold on to oxygen, resulting in reduced oxygen release and therefore reduced oxygen delivery to tissues and organs. With less oxygen delivered to the muscles, they cannot work as effectively as we might like them to. As counterintuitive as it may seem, the urge to take bigger, deeper breaths when we hit the wall during exercise does not provide the muscles with more oxygen but effectively reduces oxygenation even further. In contrast, when breathing volume remains nearer to correct levels, the pressure of carbon dioxide in the blood is higher, loosening the bond between hemoglobin and oxygen and facilitating the delivery of oxygen to the muscles and organs."

So, short story: It's not about breathing more oxygen in per se, it's about **RELEASING** the oxygen stored in our hemoglobin *into* our cells and tissues.

We need to get the right levels of CO₂ if we want to fully oxygenate. Got it. Best ways to do that?

First, reduce your breathing volume. Remember: As odd as it sounds, **OVER**breathing leads to **LESS** oxygenation as it disrupts the CO₂ levels that would have catalyzed hemoglobin to let go of the oxygen we need.

Solution: Practice breathing slowly, quietly through your nose. (All day every day. :)

And, **EXERCISE!**

When we challenge ourselves through vigorous exercise, we produce more carbon dioxide which triggers the release of more oxygen from our hemoglobin which feels great.

btw: I'm having a lot of fun these days exercising while exclusively breathing through my nose. Although it was **super** weird the first few times I tried it, I've quickly come to love it. And, it's amazing how, by breathing through my nose and getting more comfortable with higher/proper levels of CO₂ in my body (which, again, catalyzes the release of more oxygen into my cells), I'm able to perform better and recover faster. (Try it! :)

P.S. Patrick tells us: "With practice, your breathing will become calm, quiet and still. Your other option is to continue with the heavy breathing, have all of your attention in your head and deprive your brain of oxygen, resulting in increased thought activity."

ARE YOU A GOOD MIND GARDENER?

"Regardless of the extent to which thoughts have taken over, everyone has the capacity to take back control of his or her mind. A still mind is just covered up with mental noise; therefore, anything that helps to de-clutter your mind will allow stillness to resurface.

Your choice is to keep running the thoughts through your head and experience the consequences, or become a good gardener of your mind, root out the weeds and allow only the flowers to grow. A sleeping gardener is not attentive and will soon have a jungle of weeds. A good gardener is awake. He knows exactly what is happening and will guard his territory with a keen eye, removing the weeds as soon as the first shoots appear.

Be a good gardener of your mind. A mind that is being observed is an unsuitable environment for anxiety and depression to take root. Both require a lack of awareness as a suitable breeding ground."

Want to control your anxiety? Be a good gardener of your mind.

Notice when the weeds of unhelpful thoughts start popping up and yank them out (when they're tiny little sprouts) while you cultivate the beautiful thoughts you want to see flourish.

Pema Chödrön and Robin Sharma (and many other teachers) use this metaphor.

Here's how Pema puts it in [The Places That Scare You](#): "This is the path we take in cultivating joy: learning not to armor our basic goodness, learning to appreciate what we have. Most of the time we don't do this. Rather than appreciate where we are, we continually struggle to nurture our dissatisfaction. It's like trying to get flowers to grow by pouring cement on the garden."

"Formal education teaches us how to think, but it does not teach us how to stop thinking. Thought after thought after thought is enough to make us go mad!"

~ Patrick McKeown

Here's how Robin puts it in [The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari](#): "You have now learned that the mind is like a fertile garden and for it to flourish, you must nurture it daily. Never let the weeds of impure thought and action take the garden of your mind. Stand guard at the gateway of your mind. Keep it healthy and strong—it will work miracles in your life if you will only let it."

What roots do you need to pull?

Let's add some sunshine to your good seeds: What are you grateful for in your life? What's awesome right now?

Here's to optimizing your divine mental garden!

YOU AND YOUR SUPER WEIRD RIGHT ARM

"Imagine your right arm constantly moving up and down. It moves up and down many times a minute. Sometimes the movement is small and sometimes the movement is large. The activity of your right arm is a major hindrance. At the same time, it is indispensable; you are able to instruct and tell it what to do and, generally, it continues to perform any activity that your left arm does."

The only difference is that in between use and while at rest, your right arm continues to move up and down. Each day, your right arm constantly bumps into things. It accidentally knocks things over and hits other people. Every now and again, it even hits you."

Imagine having that kind of right arm.

You can move it around with your left arm when you want to use it but... when you're not deliberately using it for something it just moves up and down.

Up and down. Up and down.

Let's actually do it. Move your arm up and down. Jiggle McWiggle it.

Have it flail out and bump stuff.

Oops. Sorry. I have a super weird right arm. Just keeps moving.

That super weird right arm of yours is constantly bumping into things and people and even hitting you every once in a while.

You need to spend a ton of time trying to navigate life with this wacky right arm. Pretty much everyone else has the same problem so you don't think much about it but it's a major hindrance to you enjoying your life.

Well, guess what?

"There is little difference between a moving right arm and the human mind. The main difference is that it is easy to identify the right arm. The arm is external, visible and can be readily noticed. The human mind is cleverly located to avoid detection. It is hidden away from view and carries on unhindered in the background."

"A reporter once asked the Dalai Lama whether he held anger towards China. He replied 'They have taken everything from us, should I let them take my mind as well?'"

~ Patrick McKeown

We have lost our ability to control our minds. Our minds move incessantly in the background. Recognize your mind as a moving right arm."

Is your mind Jiggle McWiggling all day every day?

Are you even AWARE of the fact that it's pretty much constantly on?

As Sam Harris says in [Waking Up](#): "The problem is not thoughts themselves but the state of thinking without knowing that we are thinking."

He also says: "Your mind is the basis of everything that you experience and of every contribution you make to the lives of others. Given this fact, it makes sense to train it."

P.S. All of this reminds me of Augustine's famous query: "I can tell my hand what to do and it obeys. Why can't I do the same with my mind?"

QUIT NIBBLING ON THE RAT POISON

"When you generate negativity in your mind, you are bound to suffer. When your mind is peaceful and pure, you enjoy the kingdom of heaven within yourself.

Recognize how your mind affects the body and how emotions of the body affect the mind.

If you are angry with an enemy, you are the first victim.

If you are jealous of someone else, you are the first victim.

If you hate someone else, you are the first victim.

If you seek revenge from someone else, you are the first victim.

These are the fundamental laws of life. If your mind is still, pure and free from tension, anger, animosity and jealousy, then life rewards you. ...

You cannot have negative thoughts about someone else without these same thoughts having a negative effect on yourself."

Reminds me of some more wisdom from Pema Chödrön.

She tells us: "We'd be wise to question why we hold a grudge as if it were going to make us happy and ease our pain. It's rather like eating rat poison and thinking the rat will die. Our desire for relief and the methods we use to achieve it are definitely not in sync."

Let's shine a spotlight on you: Feeling a grudge toward someone?

Step back. See that: "You cannot have negative thoughts about someone else without these same thoughts having a negative effect on yourself."

Quit nibbling on the rat poison.

Eknath Easwaran gives us a really powerful way to master this process in his *great* book [The Conquest of Mind](#).

He tells us: "To give one small illustration, whenever somebody is unkind to me, I can immediately unroll the panorama of that person's good qualities. Instantly the balance is set right. As with most skills, this is a matter of practice. When you are having trouble getting along with someone, a simple first step is to sit down quietly and recall how many times that person has given you support. You are using positive memories to drive out negative ones before they have a chance to crowd together and form a mob, which is all resentment really is."

Bring to mind the individual for whom you may feel a grudge.

Rather than focus on all the little things they have done/are doing that annoy you, think of all the times that person has given you support.

"The number of times you place attention on your breath, your inner body or your senses is far more important than the length of time occupied there. Be aware many times throughout the day."

~ Patrick McKeown

Use those positive memories to drive out the negative ones before the crazy mob in your mind starts nibbling on rat poison! :)

WHEN TO CONNECT

"Gently take back control of your mind. Watch your breath, feel your inner body, reduce your breathing. Do this for pockets of a few minutes many times throughout the day.

Especially do it while you are watching TV, driving your car, waiting in line at the post office, walking down the street, exercising, in bed at night. The more often you incorporate it into your life the more you will continue with it. ...

How will you know if it is working? Quite simply, you will know by how you feel. You will feel alive and feel no tension. Your life will be softer and will unfold a lot easier."

Best time to practice this stuff?

How about pretty much all the time? :)

Eric Goodman echoes this wisdom in [True to Form](#) where he tells us: "It cannot be stressed too often or too strongly that restoring your body's natural strength and flexibility comes not through intensity of effort but through consistency."

Connect with your breath while you're driving, sitting at your desk working, standing in line at the grocery store, washing the dishes, ...

Get out of your mind. Connect with your breath. Connect with life!

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Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

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About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.