

# Jeni's Health & Fitness Tips

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Hi Everyone!

Most of the time we are unaware that we are breathing. It happens automatically, we don't have to do anything – our bodies take care of that without our awareness. However, if you take time out to observe your breathing, you can check if you breathe diaphragmatically or not. If your tummy expands on the in-breath together with the rib cage, then you are breathing with good use of the diaphragm. If your shoulders move as you breathe then the breath is shallow and you are breathing more into the upper part of the lungs. If you observe young children or pets, you will notice that they always breathe with their abdomen moving the same way as the chest.

As you will have been breathing the way you do for most of your life, it really doesn't matter and there is no reason to tell yourself that you must change a life long habit.

However, diaphragmatic breathing works well with core stability. A strong core protects the back and helps maintain good posture. If you breathe down into the belly, you can draw the lower abdominal muscles in as you exhale and also draw up the pelvic floor muscles to work the deep stabilising muscles that keep us upright and support our internal organs in this region. This technique should also be used when lifting, to protect the muscles of the lower back.

Let's look at this in two steps:

1. Take a deep breath and fill your lungs with air, then imagine that the air is travelling downwards to fill the lower abdomen as well.
2. As you exhale, draw the lower abdomen in and draw the pelvic floor\* upwards.

Do not hold your breath but simply repeat this sequence. If you want to hold the abdomen in for longer you can do this but keep breathing with shallow breaths.

If you place your fingertips on the lower back (approximately 3 or 4cm either side of the spine) you should feel your multifidus muscles contract when you do this exercise. At first these may be difficult to detect so ask your trainer or exercise instructor to help you find them.

You can practice this technique anywhere, anytime. The more you practice, the stronger your core will become. There is little benefit in training large muscle groups of the body to become stronger without also training the deep stabilising muscles of the core. It would be like a beautiful building with weak foundations!

So when doing any strenuous work, always work the core muscles on the exertion. Begin by breathing in and then, as you lift, exhale and contract those core muscles.

Yours in health,

*Jeni*

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\*If you are unsure how to find your pelvic floor muscles, imagine that you want to stop the flow of urine mid stream. These are the muscles you would be using!