

## When Do I Hold My Breath?

**Purpose:** To identify the situations and activities in which you most commonly engage in breath holding.

We don't usually recognize how much tension we invest in simple activities such as talking or cooking because we don't recognize the situation as terribly stressful. You may be surprised and disconcerted to discover that you hold your breath in almost every conceivable situation.

**Here's How:** Over the course of the week make a mental note of the situations in which you engage in breath holding. Make your observations without reproach or disappointment- catching yourself holding your breath should be cause for celebration. You've made a huge leap in self-awareness! For instance, you may notice that you hold your breath when you talk to your boss. You may hold your breath as you drive to work. Note whether the activity or situation is made easier when you breathe freely. Then try one of the following inquiries:

**Moving:** Choose one simple activity in which you have regularly noticed yourself holding your breath. It should be an activity where there are no time constraints or pressures, such as making your bed. Practice allowing your breath to move freely as an integral part of the activity. Notice whether or not your breathing and your movements synchronize when you breathe freely; it is not a failure if they do not!

**Eating:** Set aside one meal a day in which you do not feel any time constraints. Let yourself breathe slowly as you eat. Notice how it feels to allow your belly to release as you chew and swallow your food. Observe whether your meal is more enjoyable. If you tend to overeat or have digestive problems, did monitoring your breathing help you stop eating when you felt your stomach becoming full? How did you feel during and after the meal?

**Talking:** Begin to monitor your breathing during telephone conversations, noticing whether you allow yourself to pause when you need time to think, whether you allow the other person to complete his/her sentences before interrupting, and whether you feel your breathing supporting your voice. Can you tell whether the person on the other end of the line is holding their breath? Can you identify their pattern? Gradually start to integrate this into more casual conversations. Your graduation exam for this exercise is to practice breathing during an argument or confrontation. How does this practice change the way you interact with others and the outcome of your interactions?