

TTIPS VOL. 16/22 – Insights PROPER BREATHING ON THE BIKE

Before we get into this topic, I thought you might be interested in this amusing anecdote.

Donna and I were cruising through an epic ride. On the horizon ahead we spotted flashing red, blue, and yellow lights. Traffic was backed up in both directions as far as we could see.

As we got closer to the mayhem and traced our way slowly through stopped cars, we could see the problem. A truckload of thousands of copies of Roget's Thesaurus had spilled across the road. Motorists were stunned, startled, aghast, stupefied, confused, shocked, rattled, paralyzed, dazed, bewildered, surprised, dumbfounded, flabbergasted, confounded, astonished, and numbed.

You know I'm just kidding, joking, fooling around, pulling your leg, right?

INTRODUCTION

Hey fellow riders, have you ever crested a hill or finished a sprint on your trusty steed, and felt completed winded, gasping for air, and needing to stop and catch your breath? (*Right now, in your inner monologue, you are asking yourself, does Darryl know there are no hills in the Low Country?*) *Oh yeah.....no hills.* Let's try this: do you struggle for air on the KABC Saturday rides as you keep pace with your group, or climb the bridge on the HHI Cross-Island Parkway?

When I started mountain biking with my MUCH younger son, I got so winded on long climbs up steep hills that I couldn't talk. Even as a lifelong competitive runner, it was the easily most difficult cardio challenge I had ever experienced. Perhaps some of you get "gassed" on your rides and think "well, I'm out of shape," or, "I'm too old," or, "too many Margaritas last night," or whatever.

Here's the interesting thing. You might be able to learn, or perhaps re-learn breathing techniques. (*Your inner monologue kicks in again: "does Darryl know that we are all born knowing how to breathe"?*) Well, yeah, I guess. But it is possible to develop poor breathing habits in your daily lifestyle that will adversely influence your physical performance on your bike.

If you think that this might be true for you, you will find this article interesting. Let's go.

How Changing Your Breathing Can Improve Your Performance

- TAKE BETTER, FULLER BREATHS WITH THESE TIPS FOR GETTING MORE OXYGEN ON THE BIKE -

BY MOLLY HURFORD
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Yogis have been touting the benefits of focused breathing for centuries—but how many cyclists really stop and think about how they're breathing on the bike, other than just “really, really hard?” Learning to take deep, quality breaths while you pedal can change your entire ride.

That's because your labored, high-paced breathing isn't doing you any favors. Taking shallow breaths from your chest rather than filling your belly with air limits the amount of oxygen coming in and making it to those hungry muscles screaming for more. All this causes your heart rate to rise, your blood pressure to go up, your circulation to reduce, and your stressed body to go into “fight-or-flight” mode, which can make you more emotionally reactive: bad things for the bike.

But how do we change such a fundamental habit? Al Lee, author of *Perfect Breathing: Transform Your Life One Breath at a Time*, has a few ideas. “Breathing efficiency is like improving your gas mileage: Studies have shown that with a bit of training, you can improve your breathing efficiency into the 10-percent range, which translates into a 3- to 5-percent improvement in performance,” he says. That's a lot of performance benefit for very little work. Here's what you should know about maximizing your riding potential through proper breathing, which helps deliver oxygen to those muscles that need it most.

The Importance of Breathing

“Every cell in your body needs a constant and immediate supply of oxygen,” Lee says. We can survive for days without food, but without air? Minutes. “Ninety percent of the energy your body uses comes directly from the breath,” Lee adds. That's a lot of energy which means small positive changes in your breathing methods really do add up.

'Belly Breathing' Is Your Superpower

One big secret to maximizing your oxygen uptake is learning to take deep breaths—belly breaths, if you've ever been to a yoga class. The key to deep breathing is recruiting your diaphragm, a flat muscle that extends across the bottom of your ribcage, which helps push as much air through your body as possible. “When you inhale, it flexes downward and creates a vacuum,” he says. “That causes breath to rush in through your nose and mouth to your lungs... It's like a bellows.”

Your diaphragm can only do its job if make space for it. “Whether you're sitting at a desk, driving a car, or hunching on the bike, you're sitting a lot, and that crimps the space that the diaphragm expands into, so we don't breathe deeply,” Lee says. When we limit how much our

diaphragms can function, breath takes the path of least resistance and moves higher and higher into the chest, resulting in shallow breathing.

So before you even focus on your breathing itself, revamp your insides. Spend less time seated; straighten up to allow your belly and ribs to actually expand and lengthen those abdominal muscles to get out of the shallow breathing habit.

Watch a Baby Breathe

If you want to see how you should be breathing, look at someone a lot younger and less wise than yourself. When you watch a baby breathe, says Lee, you see how you should be breathing.

“It’s like they have a balloon in their stomach,” he says. “It just expands and falls back so naturally.” That’s what you want to get back to. “We slowly squeeze that out of people as they go into adolescence and adulthood, and we get into a really unhealthy pattern.”

Three In, Three Out

Practice off the bike before you worry about how you breathe on the bike, Lee says. “We normally breathe between 15 and 20 times per minute, but research has shown that if we can get our breaths down to 10 per minute—six seconds per breath—that’s when we get the best benefits from breathing.”

These benefits include lowered blood pressure and heart rate, expanded arteries for better circulation, reduction in inflammation in veins and arteries, a change in the blood chemistry to make it less acidic, and less panic and anxiety thanks to that shift in blood chemistry.

“Slow, deep breathing breaks a panic cycle,” says Lee. “And it boosts your immune system too.” Spend five minutes per day timing your breathing—three seconds in, three seconds out—and Lee believes you’ll start to see a change. “Everyone has five minutes,” Lee says, “Even if you have to hide out in a bathroom stall to get it done! And those five minutes will make those benefits start happening, and make you start doing it in normal daily life, too.” Over time, that practice will become second nature, seeping into how you breathe during everyday life and even on the bike.

Check In With Yourself

When you’re ready to test out your new and improved breathing skills while riding, remember to focus back on your breath every few minutes. If you notice that you’re breathing shallowly, take a few deep breaths to ‘reset’ your breathing.

“Breathing should always feel good and natural,” says Lee. Now, obviously you’ll end up breathing rapidly when hitting harder intervals, but if you can just make your breaths slightly deeper, you’ll make your ride that much more efficient.

Okay riders, I hope this helps. By the way, none of this will fix that Margarita thing that I mentioned in the **Introduction** above. Let's talk again soon. Until then.....

Make Every Ride Epic,

Darryl