

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a white tank top, is performing a yoga pose with her arms raised high, hands clasped together. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a bright, slightly hazy beach scene with the ocean and sky visible.

A Holistic Lifestyle: Where to begin

by Tana Edye

In an age when it is so essential that we take the responsibility for nourishing ourselves and our planet we should perhaps remember that the journey begins at home, within ourselves. Creating order within yourself is the natural prerequisite for creating order in the outside world.

Here are some practical ways in which you can assist yourself to attend to daily activities and develop a better understanding of how to perform those tasks without depleting your vital energy levels.

Continued on next page

Back to Basics

It is essential to learn to breathe correctly, that is, deeply and rhythmically, using not only the lungs, but the diaphragm and stomach as well. Utilising all of these organs will keep the abdominal muscles trim and elastic, the lungs healthy and strong, and supply abundant quantities of oxygen for the entire system.

Remember to always breathe in through the nose, as bacteria and dust particles are filtered by the tiny hairs lining the nasal passages. Prana (the vital life-force energy) is absorbed most efficiently by your system when you breathe through the nostrils. If the nasal passages are blocked, massage of the area and surrounding cheekbones will help to clear the nasal passages for easier breathing.

Allow the tummy to drop down and out when you breathe in, so that your lungs fully expand. This will increase your capacity to take in more oxygen and facilitate additional energy availability for your needs. It will generally help to create a calm and tranquil state of mind. Further, the lymphatic system, which is responsible for dispensing with waste products via the liver and kidneys, will have additional help in its work to detoxify the system. As you breathe out, contract the tummy muscles and use them to push all the air out, allowing your tummy to again drop down and out as you take your next breath. The only time you actually exert any pressure is when you contract those tummy muscles.

Learning to breathe in this way takes time and you will need to be very patient. However, the effort is well and truly worth it – you will find that in a very short space of time, you are looking and feeling much better. You may also notice greater tolerance towards those situations that might otherwise get the better of you.

Don't breathe deeply when crossing a busy road! Save it for those moments when you are in a garden, near abundant plant life or by a river or ocean – that is where the life-force energy is most prevalent. The principle of breathing rhythmically and using all of the organs mentioned above can be applied to any situation, which is just one reason why we should be concerned about the quality of our environment. Trees and natural bush areas are absolutely indispensable to our needs as healthy human beings. Plants, trees and flowers are the greatest 'ionisers' available to us. If you are able to, bring plants into your workplace. Have them near you, by your desk and encourage your workmates to do the same. You will be less tired at the end of the day and will notice increased efficiency and creative output.

Prana, or life force, from food and drink is absorbed through the taste buds

of the tongue. So it is important that your meals not be eaten quickly, but with time and patience and in a relaxed atmosphere. If deadlines at work take precedence over the nourishment of your body on an habitual level, you will find that your energy is running down and your health will suffer.

Posture is relevant to everything that you do and the overall way in which you handle situations and tasks. If slouching, you're not going to feel like breathing deeply or doing much of anything, except, perhaps, having more rest. Correct posture, with the spine upright at all times other than when you are bending is the appropriate way for you to hold yourself. Remembering to do it is an act of will that rewards your efforts in many ways.

Just as important are relaxation exercises. Remember always to breathe correctly and try to synchronise your breathing with your movement. For instance, if you are bending down to a cupboard . . . breathe out and breathe in as you bring your body back up. Every time you stretch or expand the body, breathe in, and when you bend or contract the body, breathe out – just as a balloon fills up as it expands and contracts as the air rushes out. Keep your posture erect and your breathing intact and the results will be quite astounding.

Don't sit down for long periods of time without moving about and having a stretch, if you can avoid it. The result is inevitably for the weight to pile on and a pear shape to develop right where you don't want it. At every opportunity bend and stretch your body, breathing in the appropriate way as you do so. This will help to keep the spine supple and the nervous system toned. It will help you to keep looking good and to keep youthful. These are the basic principles of hatha yoga being taken into your work and life situation. Learn and practise some yoga asanas (postures) as well, even for a short time each day. It all helps.

Here are some essential tips to achieve optimum energy levels in the course of a day, and which will, over a period of time, help you to feel better and more alive. They will help you to achieve the tasks ahead of you with a reservoir of energy whenever you need it.

Maximum Energy Levels at Home and Work

1. Upon waking, relax for a few minutes before rising. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and slowly. Think about your physical state: how does it feel? Observe how you feel that day and how you feel as the days go by. When you rise, stretch upwards towards the ceiling as you breathe in, and as you breathe out, relax the body forward towards the floor for as far as you can comfortably go, without bending the knees. Allow all your muscles and spine

to relax into it as gravity pulls you towards the floor, breathing gently in and out. When you are ready, breathe in as you slowly raise yourself upright to your original position and relax as you breathe out.

This exercise will help to keep your muscles along the spine soft and flexible; it will give a boost to the adrenals and the liver and kidneys. It's also good for the complexion, especially if, while leaning forward, you take your hands and gently pat all over your face and neck.

Now try arching your body back as you breathe in, with your arms outstretched towards the ceiling. Take your arms heavenward as you pretend to climb an invisible rope, the success of which has your life in the balance. Breathe as you stretch, relax and breathe out. Then breathe in again as you stretch and climb upwards. You are on the tips of your toes. You are strengthening and limbering your entire system. Feel the stretch to the whole of your body. Now breathe out again as you relax and bring your arms into a prayer position. The hands are directly under the chin. Breathe deeply, feeling the rise and fall of your tummy. Stay here for as long as you are able to. A few minutes is a very good balancing exercise, in this asana. You are in a normal, relaxed standing position or you may sit cross-legged if you wish.

2. Try to have a cold shower, however brief, after your normal bathing or showering routine. To tone the system and lessen the bulk, rub your hands over those areas of your body with cold water that need refining.

3. Choose healthy, nutritious foods and drinks. Chew your food well and continue breathing through your nostrils as you are doing so . . . rather than our normal practice, which is to put correct breathing on hold while eating. Fruit and cereals, or a mixture of both, depending on the time of year, are an appropriate choice for early morning. Grains are suitable for increasing body warmth in winter, and fruit for cooling during the summer months. This is the basic principle underlying the philosophy of Zen Macrobiotics. Grains, legumes, seeds and nuts, fresh fruit and vegetables provide all the essential nutrition we require for a healthy system.

4. Since Prana is most abundant where there is plant life, it is most beneficial to have these worthy companions around us as much as possible, both at work and at home. They will supply us with plenty of oxygen and chew up the carbon dioxide. They are also aesthetically pleasing.

5. Bring your breathing into line with your movement . . . consciously. Breathe in as you stretch and expand to do anything. As you stretch up to hang washing on the line . . . breathe in, and breathe out as you bend down to pick up the next item.

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Breathing correctly will help you to pick up a heavy load. Bend with your knees as you bend down and breathe out; breathe in as you pick up the object and raise yourself back up using your knees (being careful not to curve your spine).

While sitting at your office desk, remember to use your tummy muscles as you are breathing. This will exercise your abdomen and surrounding areas while you are working and give you an added store of energy with which to do that work.

6. Become familiar with the pressure points in your body, and when you feel strained around the neck and shoulders from stress, work on those points to help alleviate the discomfort. An acupuncture chart or reflexology card will show you where these points are. You can purchase a small wallet version that you can carry with you that will show you the relevant points in the hands and feet for the entire system.

7. Try to steer away from alcohol and tobacco, as they wreak havoc on the body by creating a build-up of acid and toxic wastes. They dehydrate the system and cause premature aging. Drink carrot juice or herb teas instead whenever possible as these will alkalise your system... and breathe! A healthy environment creates a healthier you!

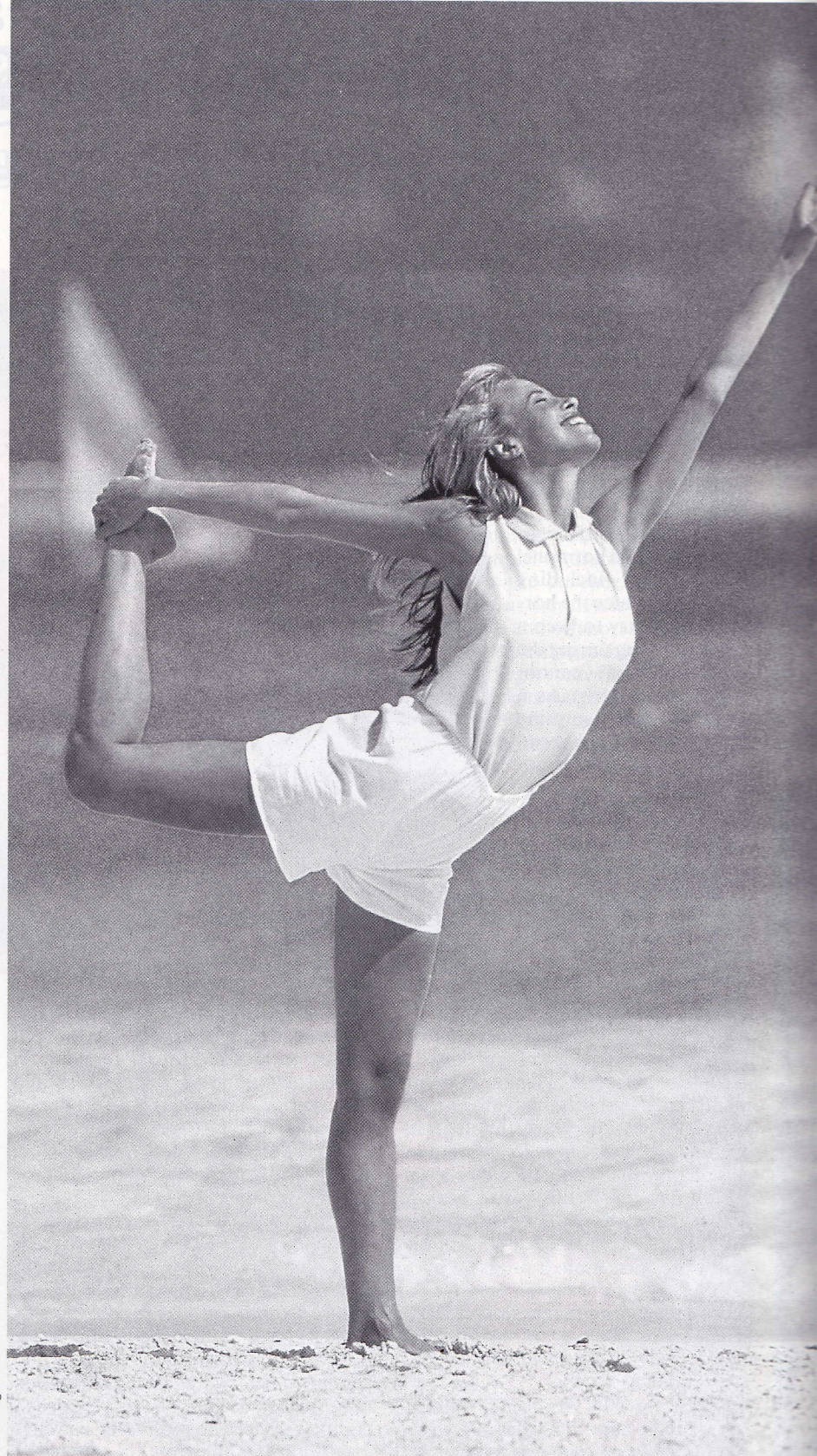
8. When you come home in the evening, relax for a little while before you do anything else. You have been giving out a lot of energy and you need some time to put some back. So lie on your back with your hands open and facing upwards. Breathe deeply in and out for several minutes and let go of the tension in your body as you breathe out. If you can, raise your legs up either by resting them against the wall or by supporting your hips with your hands. Look at your tummy and watch it rise and fall and feel the energy develop as you breathe.

Stay in this position for as long as you are comfortable. The blood moving into the top half of your body will help to energise your system, tone your complexion, induce positive thoughts and massage the thyroid and parathyroid glands which are directly responsible for regulating your weight.

When you are ready, return your legs to the floor as you breathe in, and breathe out as you relax. Continue your rhythmical breathing for several minutes before you get up and continue with your tasks. If you get up too quickly, you may hyperventilate or become dizzy, so take it easy.

9. After a nutritious dinner (that you have chewed well), relax, even if only for half an hour, *before* you do any tasks at hand. Give your body time to absorb and digest some of the nutrients you have just taken in.

10. Before sleeping breathe deeply and rhythmically as you lie in bed. Stretch all your muscles from the feet up



to your head and relax them. Work through groups of muscles such as the legs first, then your torso, arms, then shoulders, neck and head. Breathe in and hold the breath for a little while, thinking as you do so that you are being filled with radiant golden light that is washing out through every pore and

energising your entire system. As you breathe out, let the weight and heaviness go, the cares of the day, the worries and anxieties, for just a little while; let them all go. Breathe gently in and out as you enter the realm of sleep, relaxation and regeneration, fortified and prepared for a better tomorrow. ☺