

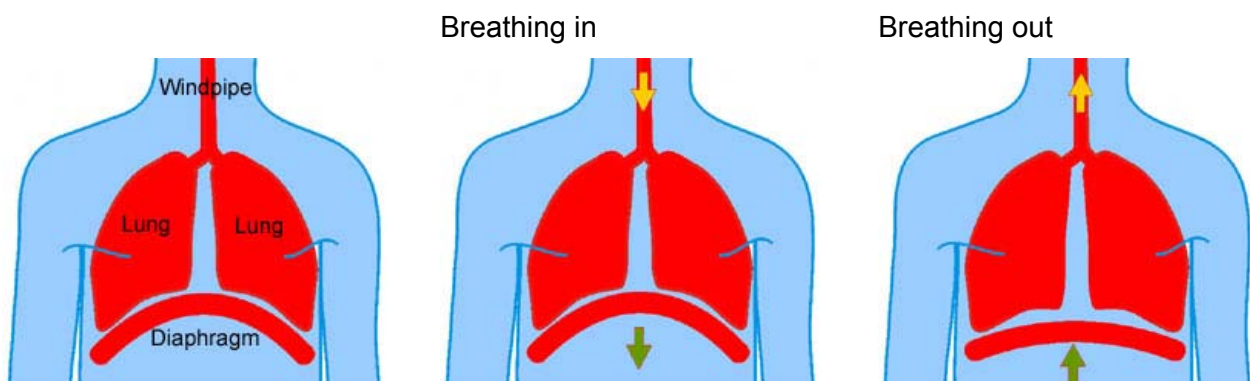
Hands up who uses their lungs!

But do we use them to the best of their ability? Especially when we are singing. The answer is probably no. If we are exercising then we don't tend to have an option - our bodies take over and increase the volume of each breath (the "depth" of the breath) and our chests expand a lot more and a lot faster. The purpose of this heaving bosom is to get more air into the lungs (and so get oxygen to your tissues).

While you are singing there is not the demand for oxygen from your body there is when you exercise so we tend to not breathe deeply enough. Does this matter? Well, yes. How else are you going to get that sound from your voice-box to the eager ear of the audience? So we have to think about breathing when we are singing.

Here is a simple exercise I learned to help you use all of your lungs when you are singing.

How we breathe



Just a quick reminder that we breathe by using our diaphragm and rib cage (which I can't draw very well so I didn't) - and air gets in and out of our lungs via the windpipe or tracheae.

To breathe in we move our diaphragm down and our rib cage out which increases the volume of the lungs and sucks in air through the windpipe.

To breathe out we move our diaphragm up and out rib cage in which decreases the volume of the lungs and blows out air through the windpipe.

THE EXERCISE

You will need

Your body, both hands free, a private place because you're going to look a bit silly when you do this!

Step 1: Breathing normally

Stand up. Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your belly and breathe normally. You will probably feel your chest go in and out a little bit and your belly not move. This is normal.

Step 2: Breathing deeply

Keeping your hands where they are breathe deeply. You will feel your chest move in and out more and may feel your belly move a bit too.

We are only using a small part of our lungs doing this so we must learn to use all of our lungs when we breathe. (Sounds silly I know but stick with me on this one)

Step 3: Using your lungs more

Keep your hands on your belly and chest but when you breathe try and move the hand on your chest in and out a lot more than you did before. Can you feel more air getting into your lungs? Practice it for a while to get used to it and think about the muscles you are using.

Step 4: Using the bottoms of your lungs

Now keep your hands where they are but try breathing without moving your chest in and out. Move your belly in and out instead (this is why you needed a private place). When you do this you can feel the air going into the bottom of your lungs - do this for a while to get used to that feeling and concentrate on the muscles you are using.

Step 5: Using the tops of your lungs

This time breathe but try not to move the hands on your belly and chest at all - the only area you can use is the tops of the lungs - be careful to try and not raise and lower your shoulders as this can cause an awful lot of tension. Can you feel the air you breathe in concentrating in the tops of your lungs? Practice it for a while to get used to the feeling and to identify the muscles you are using.

Step 6: Putting it all together

Keep your hands where they are but this time breathe in and out and make both hands move as much as possible - try and use all the muscles you used in steps 3 4 AND 5. What you should be feeling is an awful lot more air going into and out of your lungs on each breath. Get used to that feeling because this is how you should be breathing when you are singing!

TIP Now that you are breathing in and out much more air you need a bigger hole for it to move through to stop that heavy-breathing sound. Try yawning and feel how open the back of your mouth and your windpipe is - try and emulate this when you are singing - you get a lot of air in quickly!

Andy Miller