Breathing is such a natural thing to do that we seldom think about **how** we breathe. We have many sayings that reflect how our breathing affects our life. Such as "needing room to breathe", "you take my breath away", "I breathed a sigh of relief", "like a breath of fresh air" or "that was breathtaking"! However very few people realize how breathing can influence their health or how poorly they breathe. How we breathe can change our heart rate and blood pressure or cause headaches, panic attacks, and muscle tension. But what exactly is good breathing?

Quiet breathing should be at a rate of 8-10 breaths per minute. Quiet breathing is in and out through the nose. On inhalation the chest wall, ribcage and belly should all expand without use of the neck and shoulders. With exhalation the ribcage should drop and the abdominal wall sinks in.

In order to breathe this way you need to use the diaphragm as your main muscle of inhalation. For the diaphragm to work correctly there needs to be chest wall flexibility, good ribcage position and the use of muscles to help it. The intercostals are muscles that lie between the ribs and allow them to expand and contract with breathing. The abdominals connect the ribcage to the pelvis and help to stabilize for the diaphragm to work. A constricted chest wall results in shallow breaths and the use of neck muscles to assist with pulling the air in. This leads to stress and tension in the neck and shoulders. A shallow breathing habit will cause a state of arousal on the sympathetic nervous system (fight or flight) creating stress on the supportive systems of the body like digestion, circulation, and immune function. Shallow breathers often sigh, yawn, or have to take a big breath during the day.

Our therapists are trained to assess breathing patterns, ribcage flexibility and coordinated muscle activity with breathing. We may work on manual release of the ribcage, instruct in correct muscle use associated with breathing and teach breathing exercises. If a person can't breathe while they are doing an exercise or activity then their body is compensating.