

Arnold Jacobs Breathing Exercises

1. Raising Arms Above Head and Inhaling

The purpose of this exercise is to practice “general thoracic breathing”, which involves the expansion of the rib cage and abdomen. It must be done in front of a mirror.

While snapping fingers to a slow count to 5, raise both your arms above your head and inhale as much air as you can. You want inhale the air at an even rate—don’t take in too much at the beginning or end.

Drop your arms, don’t exhale, and look at yourself in the mirror. Observe how much your chest is “puffed out.” Then exhale.

Repeat several times.

2. Inhaling as above, but not raising arms above head.

This also must be done in front of a mirror.

While snapping your fingers to a count of 5, evenly inhale to your full capacity. Allow your rib cage to expand fully. It should look like it did when you dropped your arms in the exercise above.

Take a look at yourself, then exhale. Repeat several times.

3. Breathing in Thirds

This study allows you to feel different quantities of air in your lungs. We have a limited ability to do this, especially when playing an instrument.

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Use an arm as a gauge. Fully extended=empty lungs. One third of the way contracted=one third full lungs. Two thirds of the way contracted=two thirds full lungs. Fully contracted=full lungs. Make sure that your lungs are completely empty to start, and completely full when at 3/3. Then breathe out in thirds, again using the arm as a gauge.

Now, try different combinations of quantities of air. Go from 2/3 full to empty, to 3/3 full, to 1/3 full, etc.

4. 5/4 Study

This study prepares you for quick, full inhalations.

Conduct a 5/4 pattern with one hand. On beat 5, breathe in to your maximum capacity. On beats 1-4, breathe out evenly, so that by the end of beat 4, your lungs are empty. Then completely fill up on beat 5.

You'll want to do this very slowly, or you'll hyperventilate. Make sure that you exhale evenly throughout the first four beats, and that you're really pushing the last of your air out on the fourth beat. Then fill up completely—you can't possibly take in any more air—on beat 5.

Do this three times, then stop.

5. 4/4 Study

This exercise is like the 5/4 study, but you'll be conducting in 4/4. Breathe in on the last 1/8th note of the bar—the "and of four". Breathe out for beats 1-4½. Make sure you completely fill up with air and get completely empty.

Do this several times.

6. Two Bars of 4/4 Study

This is the same as the 4/4 study, except that you're going to exhale for two bars and tongue eighth notes as you exhale. Breathe in on the "and of four" in the second bar. Completely fill up with air, and get completely empty by beat four of the second bar.

Do this several times.