

## S.C.U.B.A. Tips: Control Breathing

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Taking a breath is easy as pie, right? We do it all day long. In and out. Simple, and easy, right? Wrong! In S.C.U.B.A., learning how to breathe properly serves three outstanding purposes, and not learning how to breathe properly can lead to a nasty dive.

Why should you learn to correctly breathe for diving? Well, the style that will be given here is not really just for diving, it is really meant to escalate the efficiency at which your body processes oxygen regularly, and will favor anything and everything of your being requiring fitness activity.

In the beginning, appropriate breathing helps you with the right buoyancy. If your S.C.U.B.A. instructor tells you to hold your breath while adjusting your regulator to control your diving depth, you'll quickly wind up blue in the face. Definitely not a happy experience. In place of holding your breath and relying on the regulator and weights to adjust buoyancy, breathing properly can cause subtle shifts in your flotation.

Also, proper breathing on a s.c.u.b.a. dive maximizes your air time. The breathing technique given here helps the body to utilize more oxygen, sending it to the body with greater efficiency and extending the amount of O<sub>2</sub> that gets entered into the blood stream. You won't use your air tank up as quickly, and can prolong your time diving.

Finally, proper breathing in addition to skillful control over your ascent and descent rate helps to minimize decompression sickness, which is a problem that hits divers when the immediate changes in external pressure on the body induce collections of bubbles within the blood stream, heart, and sinuses. Those little air bubbles cause a condition that S.C.U.B.A. divers refer to as The Bends, which can be anything from barely painful and basically annoying, to fatal by producing a stroke or brain damage.

That said and done, let's get into the right breathing method to implement.

Speaking from my personal diving experience, the breathing technique that should be employed in S.C.U.B.A. are similar to that utilized by gymnasts, yoga practitioners, singers and martial artists. This is a method called diaphragm breathing, and goes by several fancy names depending on which the discipline is using it, like in martial arts where it is referred to as Chi or Ki Breathing.

To make use of diaphragm breathing, either stand or sit up (your choice), and just breathe in and out. Don't slouch. Observe how you take the air in. Your chest should expand when taking a deep breathe. This is normal, everyday breathing. In diaphragm breathing, the lower stomach expands instead of the chest.

To do this accurately, the most important factor is to relax. The stomach muscles will normally tighten up when you take a breath and try to concentrate on your stomach. Don't concentrate on your gut, just relax and breathe in, but make sure of actually relaxing your navel area when you inhale. Most people get diaphragm breathing wrong because they tense up the gut muscles in an effort to send their breath there. Contracting these muscles causes them to contract, which keeps air from going that deeply. This is all there is to this way of breathing. It is actually very easy, once you get the hang of it.

It's also important to keep your breathing in rhythm slow, deep, and even when you are practicing this method, inhaling as far as you can go, hold the air in your lungs for just a few seconds, then exhale the air evenly and slowly. Rapid, shallow breathing, as most medical practitioners know, is a very, very bad thing, which leads to asphyxiation, a state where not enough oxygen gets run through the body.

By the way, the air, of course, isn't really going into your stomach. It just expands because the diaphragm is located right above it in the body. Small anatomy lesson here: the diaphragm is a membrane which controls the expansion of the lungs, which causes the inhalation and exhalation of air. In essence, what this method of breathing achieves is to strengthen your diaphragm, while all the time increasing the capacity of your lungs. Keep practicing this method until it seems instinctive, and you'll be surprised at the results you achieve. Not just in your S.C.U.B.A. diving, helping in your overall health condition.

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