

# On Corona Self-Mitigation

Belgium, March 26, 2020

## Introduction

Our world is changing fast. At the end of 2019, a new corona virus emerged and got named SARS-CoV-2. Spreading fast, it grew into a global COVID-19 pandemic through the first months of 2020.

Most of those infected experience something that resembles a 'normal' flu. Some may only get intestinal symptoms or may not feel any symptoms at all. While good news for them, this fact makes an accurate diagnosis difficult and combined with long incubation times, often results in a high risk of infecting others.

Moreover, an estimated 15-20% of those infected start developing severe symptoms such as pneumonia. Often suddenly. Fluids can start filling their lungs and lung efficiency can degrade considerably. This condition makes it very difficult for the body to extract enough oxygen from the air into the bloodstream. And vital organs need oxygen.

It is very important for patients to consult a certified physician and get help.

Because without treatment, conditions like this can permanently damage vital organs and result in death.

Luckily, hospitals can prevent this outcome by actions such as providing concentrated oxygen or even giving those that need it access to a mechanical ventilator. This gives the immune system time to fight the virus. Physicians can also provide medication and tools, (sometimes new and experimental), that can help considerably. They have proven treatments for most other symptoms or perhaps even co-infections that might appear. At the time of writing, there is no proven vaccine or cure available for 'corona'. Luckily, most people with Covid-19 will succeed and get better. Some die.

Sadly, when too many people need treatment at the same time, local medical infrastructure can get overwhelmed. Governments worldwide are doing what they can to prevent this from happening.

Both by containment measures and increasing the capacity of hospitals. However, some countries and communities may not have the leadership or resources needed to prevent tragedies.

Many medical professionals and others that are involved are putting their lives at risk while doing all they can to help others. We cannot appreciate and thank them enough for their selfless and often heroic deeds. Hopefully, the world can 'flatten the curve' and save millions of lives.

However, in the event this effort would (locally) fail, many people risk finding themselves infected without help available. In my personal view, those people deserve access to all relevant information and knowledge available. That can help them keep control, mitigate symptoms, and increase their chances.

However, even when prepared and supported by tools, there are no guarantees and the risks remain enormous. But who can deny people in need a last chance for survival?

This document is written with that that specific situation in mind. It is based on the experience of the author and contains the advice and information he would have preferred to have access to when he got infected. He developed pneumonia and his naivety, overconfidence and stubbornness made him develop ways to mitigate symptoms from his own home until recovery. He was lucky to succeed. Many others are better qualified to give advice. It is not up to the author to judge the relevance of his experience and this document to others. People are vastly different and symptoms may evolve differently. I sincerely hope that society can find a proven method for Covid-19 self-treatment. Or at least a way that enables those that need it to increase their chance for survival or try with dignity and hope. We do not want to suggest there is a solution that is better than those used at hospitals. However, please also keep in mind that having less people needing urgent care treatment can also help others once capacity is saturated.

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It is impossible to help everybody. Sadly, not everybody will have the right state-of-mind and enough strength, skills and experience available to have a chance.

This is not a medical or scientific paper. The author is aware he does not have a full understanding of the medical, biological and chemical processes behind many events, symptoms and exercises described in this document. Because of that, he only can try to describe them to his best understanding. Remarks and feedback are welcome.

Giving advice to a patient which is willing to mitigate dangerous symptoms himself is a difficult task, certainly with no proven methods or alternatives available. As may be observed from the writing style and disclaimer in this document, the author is aware of many liability issues that may prevent physicians from taking action in this regard. Hopefully, some level of academic interest may rise in patients taking an active part in fighting this virus.

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## **Personal Background**

In March 2020, the covid-19 virus started spreading fast in my area. I got infected at some date in the 2 weeks before strict containment measures were implemented. Maybe because I took the unwise decision to attend a whisky fair by train on March 7 and drink a very tasty but unhealthy amount of alcohol. However, there is no way for me to know with any certainty where and how I got infected.

On Friday 13, mild flu-like symptoms became apparent and forced me to self-quarantine at home. On March 16, my physician diagnosed me with 'corona'. Because of my age (33) and good health, I expected to be one of the 'mild' cases. However, the symptoms developed into severe lung problems in the following days. I got such breathing problems that I felt forced in finding a solution, and fast. Quick research helped me to drain the fluids from my lungs with good results. The next day I even thought this method alone would be enough to get better and prevent me from going to the hospital.

However, my physician and a doctor at the hospital managed to convince me to get a lung scan. At the hospital, they -again- gave me the diagnosis 'corona'. Contrary to what their doctor had promised over the phone, the staff was very busy and did not prioritize me for a CT-scan to keep resources available to 'critical' patients. My physician explained to me later that their strict triage decision had been based on a threshold on blood oxygen saturation. Apparently, the breathing exercises I was doing to keep control had raised my SpO<sub>2</sub> level (from the 88% I measured earlier at home) to a value above that threshold.

However, I was happy with going back home as I was of the opinion that I could handle these symptoms myself. (further explained in the motivations chapter of my report)

I then even wrote a naive 'message' to inform others about my recent insights.

Unexpectedly (to me), after this initial improvement, my lung efficiency started degrading significantly again. Using previous experiences and breathing techniques proved essential in keeping my oxygen saturation levels as high as possible. My 'simplified' take on this situation, is that when your lung efficiency has been reduced by for example a factor of 5 times, your body should handle this the same way as when your oxygen consumption has been raised by a factor of 5: breathing more and deeper.

*(note: I am aware that reality is more complicated: the necessary increase of breathing pace is not linear and the right breathing techniques should be used to prevent a depletion of your blood carbon dioxide level)*

In my opinion, the skill that helped me the most were the breathing/restoring exercises I have learned from doing the martial arts 'systema'. Having good stamina and earlier practice with long breath holds (apnea both under/above water), and spending time at high altitudes (few weeks at between 4000-6000m) certainly helped a lot too. Possibly some limited experience with activities such as scuba diving were helpful.

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Goal was to continue doing this until my immune system has had enough time to fight the virus. Monitoring myself and keeping control of my breathing proved to be very difficult without losing focus. When my sub-consciousness took back control over my breathing and slowed it down, I started experiencing alarmingly dangerous symptoms. I kept on making improvements to 'my method' based on the experience and insights I got from my mistakes and some experimentation,

After a few days of mitigating symptoms this way, I started writing my 'method' down, in hope it could be used by others later on. On the first days, I was convinced this method could help many others, maybe even 'solve' corona. But the difficulties I encountered later on made me understand that it is not that easy and took away much of that confidence. Certainly March 18 and 19 proved to be challenging and made me introduce a lot of extra 'rules and warnings' to my procedure. Luckily, on March 20 my lung efficiency started improving again significantly. I do understand now that I was very lucky and do not recommend anybody to endure this on their own. However, I am also convinced that earlier access to the right knowledge would have made my 'adventure' a lot less dangerous.

Since last Saturday, I have decreased the interval and intensity of my method gradually. However, my earlier experience has shown me that corona can be very unpredictable and overconfidence is dangerous. So to me, there is no rush to stop too soon.

At the moment of writing (March 26), I have almost fully stopped following my method but keep control of my breathing.

Survivorship bias makes it difficult to evaluate my own methods.

However, I still hope 'the procedure' I used on myself can inspire or warn others or at least call those with more knowledge and experience into action. Some might only want to read this document to form an idea of what symptoms covid-19 can cause.

## Contents

First, I will show you the method/procedure I used to mitigate my own symptoms on page 4. After that on page 11, I will list the skills I think where relevant and suggest training methods that enable others to obtain them. Those exercises can be practiced from home and are not dangerous when doing them correctly and observing the warning notes. In my view, it can be beneficial to others to learn those skills, even when never needing them for corona.

Originally, I included reports on my health progress in this document as they can give you the right background to understand my situation and judge the relevance to others.

However, as most of it was written while tired and low on oxygen, the writing quality is far from good and the text is very lengthy. They are still available to those who request them and currently also at [http://www.dje.be/corona\\_report.pdf](http://www.dje.be/corona_report.pdf).

This document is still a draft and far from finished. Please send feedback and interesting information/sources to [corona@dje.be](mailto:corona@dje.be). However, keep in mind that I will not change 'my method' itself. While not perfect, it will at least remain the same way as how I used it myself. Alternative ideas and techniques can be added in a separate list or document. The most recent version of this report can be found at [www.dje.be/corona.pdf](http://www.dje.be/corona.pdf) (version number at top right of page)

On a healthy world,

Jeroen/DJE

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# My procedure

I will now explain the procedure I have used on myself to mitigate my own corona symptoms.

In other parts of this document, I will often reference it by calling it 'my procedure'.

It is written as a guide aimed at my past self.

**So keep in mind that where I have used 'you', 'yours' etc. from now on, this should be interpreted as me speaking to my 'past' self.** As said earlier, I cannot determine what works for others or even advise them on what they should do. I can only share information. Please use common sense.

This procedure is not easy and can only be followed by those that can perform at least part of the breathing exercises outlined in 'Skills'(page 10) and have enough self-knowledge and self-discipline to continue doing it correctly. Luckily there is no need to follow the procedure if you have healthy lungs, and you may have better options available to you. However, I would recommend practicing this more than a few times so you understand what skills and maybe tools you are lacking before you need them.

Once needed, the motivation to succeed will come on its own, but I strongly advise you to not wait for that. In my experience your body will feel quite fine until you are already in deep trouble.

Once you get in a state with a lot of fluid build-up in your lungs and/or almost no oxygen in your blood, it will get many many times more difficult to regain control.

Trust me on this. So don't make the same mistakes and make it way easier for you. When following all notes and warnings, I hope the task will get significantly less challenging and dangerous and not all skills need to be used.

Why is this a cycle? Sadly, once needed, doing it only a few times is no option. You will need to continue until your body has destroyed the virus and you have regained sufficient lung efficiency.

That can take days or weeks, I cannot predict. But when done well, this should be achievable and quite bearable.

## The cycle

### [Step #1] gravital lung drainage

*Note: if you got at step 1 immediately after waking up, or feel your oxygen saturation is low, please raise your oxygen saturation levels first(see step #4) and get back here. .*

Have some towel, or similar close to your head.

Or if you are lucky or followed the hype, you can use toilet paper, which you can also safely flush in the toilet without creating a biohazard for the cleaners . A big tray is ideal as you can flush the contents down the toilet too when done. That is what I use myself, with a towel on the side.

Put some pillows under your hip/belly area (but not supporting your chest itself) .

Make sure your chest is lower than your hips and your head is the lowest point. So put your lungs as vertical as is still comfortable. If you start doing this exercise in time, you can do this progressively without having to go to the extreme (fast).

Slowly inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth with abdominal breathing.

Gravity may slowly start draining fluids from your lungs after a few minutes already or even faster.

Pain gives a good indication on where to focus(that side up), but please keep also doing the other sides.

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You can help the process by tapping on your chest and back (not on spine). With tapping I mean quite soft but 'deep' strikes, for example with a 'cupped' fist. The strikes itself should not be 'hard' enough to cause any damage if you stay relaxed. Areas that are difficult to reach can be hit with something like a stick or the handle of a nagaika.

When coughing, I experienced that you can cough up more if you use two coughs shortly after each. Once the fluids are inside your mouth you can swallow them in or spit/gurgle them out. If they get in your nose just blow your nose. And off course support your head with your arms so you do not fall over, certainly when going (almost) vertical. Do the same for each side (not each lung is affected the same), on your back and on your stomach. Repeat until the 'flow' stops or you need rest.

*note: Perhaps by luck, on the first days of doing this, I did not have any snot/slime in my nose before starting the drainage. This made it much more easy to evaluate my technique and condition. This allowed me to feel the fluid 'flowing up' during my exercises, closer and closer to my mouth/nose.*

***important note: my fluids/slime remained transparent/colourless at all times. In my understanding, green/yellow/.. colours would have been signs of a bacterial infection. In that case I would have consulted my physician about them and have taken antibiotics if necessary.***

Please also look up the terms ACBT huffing. (google/ YouTube)

If you replace the coughing by huffing in the above exercises, you will get much more effective. It can be more tiring in the short run, but is very effective and causes much less pain after. (your throat will confirm)

I also had very good results with the following method, but be careful to only do it when you feel strong: Lay flat close to the side of your bed, with a towel over the side. Keep your belly/hips/legs flat on your bed.

Hang with your shoulders above a tray on the ground like in a push up position. Breathe in to 100% and hold it for a moment. Now lower your head to the ground and do the huffing.

You can later on do this again on each side with support of your arms. (did not do this on my back)

Try to ignore pain and breathe as far in as you can.

You will feel for yourself what approach is the most effective to you.

Your condition will vary over time so keep variation. Do it enough and don't get lazy.

*NOTE: Inhaling deeply is very important, since it move air under and behind secretions/fluids which are stuck deep in your lung. When air gets behind the secretions it will slowly move them up. If you need a way to breathe deeper, you can use the following method as inspiration to stack air:*

*Take a deep breathe in, then only exhale about 70% of what you just inhaled, immediately take a deep breath in again, and exhale about 70% again. If you repeat those steps you will end up being able to fill your lungs with more air than normally. Once your lungs are as full as it gets, hold your breath for 3-5 sec. After that, you need to do the opposite:*

*Exhale normally (all the 100%), and breathe in only 70%, and in subsequent breaths decrease the amount that you inhaled from 70% to 50% to 30%, while breathing out normally. This makes you breathe in different sections of your lungs (from peripheral to proximal) and moves the fluids towards your upper airways where you can cough/huff them out.*

## [Step #2] restoring

Step #1 can be very uncomfortable and tiring. Certainly after moments in which you could not breathe because of fluids blocking your airway. So check yourself and use faster breathing (from step 4) to restore oxygen levels,

## [Step #3] cleansing

Rest some time (minutes not hours), It can be difficult to drain the fluid directly from your lungs into your mouth. I still struggle with it. So some will still be in your upper airway. So swallow, blow that excess out your nose and or if needed cough out what is still in your throat. As soon as you feel ready, repeat from step 1 until almost no fluids come out of your lungs.

**If your lungs got 'free', you can go to step 4**

## [Step #4] Oxygenating

Keep in mind: Stable breathing without pains and discomfort does NOT equate enough oxygen.

Use faster breathing to increase the oxygen saturation in your blood. (see skill 4)

*Warning: using the wrong 'hyperventilation' technique that depletes your CO<sup>2</sup> will make it much more difficult to maintain steady breathing after this.*

Keep this up until you have enough. (get into the 96-100% range, the higher the better)  
Having access to an oximeter (SpO<sup>2</sup> sensor) helps tremendously to judge that.  
Make sure the values stay high for at least a few minutes.

I made a table down further listing what 'symptoms' I felt. They help detecting this without oximeter. You may also use your own methods to detect this.

It is not critical to differentiate all those levels. As long as you are very careful to avoid the lowest ones. These levels and numbers were useful to assess my current condition and compare it to others.

Even without, the theory is easy: if your value is too low: breath faster and more. Stop when you reach close to 100% saturation. However keep in mind that keeping a proper oxygen level in your blood is essential and my action was already dangerous with an oximeter.

When in the condition I was in, oversaturation proved to be totally impossible the first days. (seen note about 'oversaturation' on page 18)

So I was not scared of it and did not take it into account anymore

With bad pneumonia, you will probably also not oversaturate yourself easily.

And even then, the danger is probably lower than compared to staying with low SpO<sup>2</sup> levels (<90%) for too long. But if you are trying this when healthy, then please watch your 'levels' and stop oxygenating at the first symptoms.

## [Step #5] Maintain steady breathing

Once your oxygen levels are good, you can stop the very-fast breathing. That is good, because it can be tiring on the long run.

But keep full control of your breathing and maintain a faster breathing pace, compensating for the current inefficiency in your lungs. Keep calm and relaxed and take deep breaths.

**BE WARNED:** If your sub-consciousness takes over it will slow your breathing down again. (as is not aware your lungs are losing their efficiency and you have not enough oxygen in your blood)

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You will need to build some experience to determine the ideal pace. This will need to be higher than normal enough to maintain your levels but without getting tiring. The feedback loop of checking your own oxygen saturation regularly will help with that.

Keep in mind: you can store some oxygen in your blood so there is a delay in this feedback loop. And it will also take some time after reaching ‘dangerous’ levels before your body starts showing ‘symptoms’ of low oxygen saturation. These symptoms (including headache) can stay with you for some time even after restoring your levels.

*NOTE: Again: contradicting what I did myself the first day: allow yourself to take deep breaths and breath past the pain. (also in step 1, but it is better to not focus on it the first times)*

*This pain is not caused by a knife pushing in your back, so push through against it. It can even help release slime/fluids. And yes there is a physical limit to your lung capacity, possibly a lot smaller than you want it to be. But discover it by physics instead of pain. The deeper you inhale, the fewer problems you will get later on. Off course, you should be able to keep doing this for hours.*

*So stay a little below this limit but best to check it often so you do not start to get lazy and revert to ‘shallow’ breaths only.*

(I think it is beneficial to raise internal lung pressure, see note at skill 4)

## [Step #6] Self-check and activity

Keep the faster breathing pace up, and check yourself constantly that you are still in control. Check your oxygen saturation with the oximeter or by listening to your body.

You can now start to put your mind on other things outside of your own body but also should keep monitoring your breathing to keep your oxygen levels high enough.

Staying calm and relaxed is very important. Relaxation helps you with breathing deeply (certainly tension in your shoulders can prevent that) and being calm also lowers your oxygen consumption.

So try techniques that help you calm down, but make sure they do not slow down your breathing with it. Understand that the more intense or physical the activity, the faster your body uses oxygen. Ideally, try to keep your heartrate low.

**In case you feel you can breathe less deep as before, or feel some obstruction getting into your lungs, go back to step #1.**

Once you are confident you can do this, you can slowly start to do other things.

But at the same time keep checking yourself constantly!

When in control, begin with doing the basic necessities:

Drinking, eating, washing yourself with soap, laundry, emptying your tray, cleaning up so you do not slip etc. (but be careful with using a vacuum cleaner) Open a window from time to time to get some fresh air inside. Keep control of your breathing, and keep monitoring your oxygen levels regularly.

If you get better at this routine, you can slowly but carefully also start doing other things.

Preferably things that make or keep you relaxed.

**If you feel tired and think you can/need sleep, go to step #7**

**If you want to start doing any extra activities, you NEED to take my warnings on the next page into account!**

**WARNINGS:**

Be VERY careful when you start doing things that take away your concentration. Such as watching a movie or reading too much. Put a timer at maybe 15-20 minutes and when it goes of check if you are still controlling your breath at the right pace. If you are unsure if were still in control, that probably means you were not.

A confirmation of this loss of control would be if you notice your oxygen levels have gone down. In that case stop your activity immediately and do oxygenation first. Do not do this activity again, certainly not without a timer/alarm set. Doing 'work' such as writing a thesis is very dangerous and should be avoided at all cost!

Talking is also dangerous. Talking, and certainly about emotional things, is one of the things that disrupt you from controlling your breath. So do not talk too long in one go, and better: do not talk at all.

**If you try, do it incrementally in different levels of speech:**

- **Level 0** – do not talk at all, but use sms/mail/chat. Avoid getting emotional. It is much more difficult to control your body and calmness ones strong feelings and thoughts take over. Stop the conversation if you lose control.
- **Level 1** – Try but by taking extra breaths between each word. Restore during each pause. Put a timer. Is difficult to do while not looking weird to the person you are talking to, certainly if they can see you directly or through some video chat. Do not let that shame take over. Just aim the camera away while they talk if you have difficulty with that. If you need to, end the conversation

**Level 2** – same as 1, but you can wait with the extra breath until the end of your sentence.

**Level 3** – control your breathing during talking. Do not speak too fast. Go back to a lower level if you notice you lost control.

AGAIN: do not underestimate this risk. Certainly if you feel like you lack some breathing techniques/skills. I guarantee you; you do not want to find yourself in a state where you are physically unable to take the next breath.

If you notice you forgot to check/control your breathing and your oxygen levels are getting low, do the oxygenation until you feel restored. If you get more sensitive to your own 'levels', you can also just 'slightly' adjust your breathing pace to adjust for the activity or lung-efficiency change. Don't worry; I also could not last in step 5 long without needing this quite often. Be happy you detected your lower levels in time.

After a few hours restart the cycle at step 1. Determine the exact duration of this step in advance, so you will not postpone it. Start with about one hour, and only gradually make the interval longer. Do not do any big increase, certainly never more than 50%. And there is no real need to increase the duration to longer than 5 hours. The only reason could be to 'prove' to yourself or others that you are getting better. Do not make the same mistake as I did. This 'self-check' is not worth it. Don't be lazy.

If you would make the mistake of waiting too long, step #1 will be much harder and unpleasant.

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You may get the false sense you do not need this anymore if you keep doing it well for some time. But that feeling is very dangerous. It is safer to notice you have less fluids each time (and difficult to judge what amount goes into your stomach) than to prolong the delay.

*NOTE(added one week later) I have some suspicion now that the extreme thirst I experienced was in some way correlated to the amount of fluids getting into my lungs.*

As said; for some reason the amount of fluid coming out during the drainage does not always directly correlate with how useful it feels. You may not notice the result in your ease of breathing after. But without it you would probably feel much worse.

And bonus: If you do step 1 (well) enough, you will also notice that during the other steps of the cycle you will be able to cough/huff up some fluids from time to time too.

## [Step 7] Sleeping

If you feel tired and/or need to sleep:

Don't worry; you will wake from your sleep anyway after a few hours when your brain signals trouble. I was also afraid to trust that assumption, but this text is proof that I survived.

However: when waking up that 'reason' may not become clear to you immediately.

So do not try to go back to sleep without oxygenating yourself and doing the drainage first.

No excuses, unless you verified your levels are good.

To allow yourself longer times between each drainage (it is not really pleasant), sleep or rest with your hips elevated to a height that is still comfortable. Ideally lay on your stomach with a towel under your face. This helped me a lot. Swallow the fluids in your mouth or blow your nose when it starts to fill.

Get enough sleep and do not wait until you get too tired.

## Ending the cycle

Once your immune system has completed its work and corona is out of your body, you can finally stop this cycle. However, I have made the mistake of thinking I could stop too early, twice. Be very cautious.

This virus can cause many ups and downs. So it is not because you have seen a big improvement and feel 'fine' for a few hours that you can stop.

*I am actually still busy. But increased my 'my procedure' interval to 5 hours on Saturday.*

*Partly because of the discovery last Friday that my lung efficacy was restored, but mostly because I slept more than 8 hours uninterrupted on Friday night.*

*On Monday I increased it to 10 hours*

*Not sure when I will stop. Not because I am still afraid to get critical or die if I stop, but it is healthier to continue. And doing 'my procedure' does not mean that I am still doing burst-breathing or that there is still fluid coming out: I just keep control and check my levels. Because those are fairly good now, I do not need to resort to extra oxygenation. There is no rush and practice makes it 'second nature'.*

# Skills

I understand I was lucky to have been healthy with good stamina before the infection and to have had the right background to use 'my procedure' without needing additional oxygen. It is impossible for me to compare the gravity of my symptoms to those receiving additional oxygen. And even there, people die. So again, I was lucky.

Let's outline what specific skill I have used and which exercises can help obtaining them.

I have mentioned systema earlier. This is the Russian martial art I have been doing for many years now. Being a (great) combat system, it teaches you as part of its fundamentals how to stay relaxed and controlled. Allowing you to keep calm during worst-case situations, but at the same time react strong and efficient. A big part of that is based on a wide range of very simple but very effective breathing exercises and work on your 'psyche'.

I am not implying only systema will teach those 'skills'. There are probably other martial arts or sports that focus on them or parts of it too. But I do have no experience in them.

As breathing is universal, I suspect many 'basic' techniques will be very similar to those used in yoga etc.

I will first focus on those things that I think are essential.

After that I will list other skills that have helped me, for example for keeping calm after having lost control. Keep in mind I am not a systema instructor myself and that I have not done most of these exercises myself recently. Once you have 'mastered' the skill itself and practice/use it in daily life, you do not need to 'work' on exercises anymore.

While there are other exercises that I can think of, the nature of this pandemic makes me focus on things that you can do on your own and from your own home.

**WARNING: the following exercises should be started by healthy individuals only. Prior conditions can make these drills very dangerous and even deadly. Risk groups include people with heart/lung or metabolic conditions and/or high or low blood pressure. Consult your physician for advice.**

## Fundamental skills

Essential skills

### 1. Conscious breathing

**Goal: actively control your own breathing**

**Exercise:**

First, observe your current breathing rhythm.

Determine a rate that is different from your current one, but at first also one that is not too much faster or slower. For example: 5 seconds in and 8 seconds out.

Now start using this newly determined fixed rhythm and use it actively for at least 5-10 minutes.

tell yourself/think on EACH inhale: "I'm breathing in"

and on each exhale: "I'm breathing out"

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## 2. Fundamental breathing

**Goal: master deep breathing**

**Exercise:**

Breathe by using your stomach muscles in the first part of the inhale, and let your chest muscles take over and at the last stage bringing your shoulders and collarbone closer to your head. It is important to do this relaxed without needless tension. The exhale is in the opposite order, starting with shoulders, then moving your chest first down and then in, and ending with contracting your abdomen.

Breathing should be one continuous movement, each phase merging into the next without any obvious transition point.

*NOTE: 'deep' breathing is so fundamental that many exercises and explanations can be found online. There are many subtle variations, and each type of breathing has its own specific use case or benefits. Also look up fundamental breathing exercises (google/YouTube/..) by using following terms: 'abdominal breathing', 'diaphragmatic breathing', 'systema breathing', 'yogic breathing', Keep in mind that you do not need to breath in more than your body needs. After some experience, your body will tell you what works best for which situation and 'how deep' is sufficient.*

## 3. Oxygenation

**Goal: raise the oxygen saturation level in your blood**

faster breathing: breath in through your nose with full lung capacity, and then breath out through your mouth until your lungs are 'empty'. Use a faster pace than 'normal' breathing.

*however, to avoid CO<sup>2</sup> depletion in your blood, burst-breathing is much safer when your blood oxygen is near saturation.*

(systema) burst-breathing: each breath consists of a short quick inhale through the nose, followed by a short, forceful exhale through your mouth, while keeping your lips open just enough that they do not make much 'additional' sound.

*NOTE: An important aspect is making sure the lung 'pressure' increases during the exhale(same as when you would mimic blowing into a balloon while keeping your mouth shut).*

*After the inhale and pressure increase, you can optionally add a small pause (breath-hold of 250ms - 2 seconds) before releasing the air through your mouth.*

*In my understanding, this increase in lung-pressure allows the better extraction of oxygen from the lungs and at the same time prevents the depletion of CO<sup>2</sup>.*

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You can probably find some examples on YouTube when looking for ‘systema burst breathing’

**WARNING:** it is also not good to go into hyperventilation for longer than a few minutes when having healthy lungs. See the note on page 18.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** after using too much wrong 'hyperventilation', your sub-consciousness will try to slow your breathing even more.(because of decreased CO<sup>2</sup>) This makes keeping control even harder !

So please **stop practicing as soon as you start to feel ‘oversaturation’ symptoms.** (Unless you were already “light” in your head before), this shows you it works.

**NOTE: you can practice these techniques in next exercise**

#### 4. Restoring yourself

**Goal: after reaching an oxygen depleted state, restore your oxygen levels fast**

Do a deep inhale or exhale(both ‘starts’ should be practiced) and hold your breath. Now start doing an intense/tiring exercise such as push-ups , squads, leg-lifts,... without breathing. As soon as you feel you cannot continue any longer, try to restore yourself by ‘oxygenation’ techniques. Keep doing the oxygenating techniques until you feel restored. From that moment on, repeat. (hold your breath again and immediately go back to doing the workout until you cannot continue any longer,...)

This exercise allows you to check your own breathing performance. When using a chronometer, you can evaluate yourself and/or compare the effectiveness of different techniques. It also learns you to observe your own oxygen saturation levels.

NOTE1: certainly the first times, it is best to stop early instead of pushing your limit. This allows you to get to know yourself first

NOTE2: if you measure the time you can endure doing the workout on one breath, you can use it to evaluate your self-assessment skills. After all: if you have really restored yourself, you should be able to do the ‘workout’ again for about the same duration as before restoring yourself. Off course, you should not repeat too many times as after some time you will get tired too because of a lack of energy(glucose etc).

NOTE3: you can find your optimal restoration method yourself. You do not need to stick to the same technique/pace during a single ‘restore’ phase. So you can for example start with ‘burst breathing’ that evolves in deep, faster breathing before going slower and reaching your ‘restoration point’



## Additional systema breathing exercises

#	Goal	Example exercises
5	<b>reduce stress and keep calm</b>	Slow breathing with focus on the removal of tension in your body with each exhale. Also focus on each limb separately.
6	allow you to monitor your own levels of tension/relaxation and health	Breathe slowly. On the inhale, tense up your whole body, and on the exhale relax everything. Then do this same thing for only specific parts of your body
7	<b>Keep focus on your breathing while doing unrelated tasks</b>	start walking around with on one-step the inhale, the next the exhale. (1-1) After maintaining the exact same walking speed for a while, increase this to 2 steps per inhale and 2 steps per exhale (2-2). Keep increasing this and decrease the numbers also back later on. More than 8-10 steps per in/exhale is not needed. (but up to 20 can be possible with experience). Make sure you check regularly that you still follow the 'right' rhythm. NOTE: when you can do this, you can replace 'walking' by rolls on the floor, push-ups, sit-ups etc.

The following exercises are more advanced, and less 'critical' to master. Certainly read the notes first:

#	Goal	Example exercises
8	allow you to reduce your own hearth rate	Heart coherence technique: Breath in for 5 seconds, and then out for 5 seconds. Keep this up for at least a few minutes  More advanced:  try first to get the sensitivity to feel/hear your own hearth rate, if possible without touching, and then try coordinating your breathing so you get 3 beats for each inhale and 3 for each exhale. Keep this up some time, and then start breathing a little slower until you notice your heartbeat also slows down and again matches the count. Repeat. Do not 'cheat' by adjusting your breath. (Once you can do this, using 4 hb in and 7hb out helps even more to calm down)
9	Allow you to keep (control of	while breathing slowly, gradually put heavy weights on top of your

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	your) breathing under severe stress and pain, learning you not to panic	<p>upper body on your chest and/or belly, until you get trouble breathing in.</p> <p>Then try to explore how you can restore your breath by breathing through parts not under pressure, even if that is for example only a part of your back.</p> <p>Once your breathing is restored, increase the weight.</p> <p>Make sure the weight can be removed quickly if you might get in trouble. This weight can also be a training partner (who you have already been in contact with recently anyway)</p>
10	Keep your breathing in control, regulate your temperature, activate your immune system	<p>(Systema) cold water dousing: Traditional way: Fill a bucket with cold water. Wait a few minutes while standing on solid ground. Outside is preferred, but not needed. Empty the bucket over your own head. Recover your breathing. And next time: make sure your breathing can stay uninterrupted while doing this.</p> <p>You can also do this with a shower, by going from 'dry' to immediately under a cold shower. However the effect is less strong.</p>
10B	Keep your immune system activated, help cough up slimes	<p>A healthy variation on cold water dousing: (I developed this technique over the years, after hearing about 'wisselbaden'. Many others do something similar)</p> <p>When under the shower (maybe after doing #10)</p> <p>Put the temperature on hot (typical comfortable setting, maybe even a few degrees warmer) Keep it like that for a short while. And then suddenly put the temperature at the coldest. Your body will be 'shocked' and tries to raise its temperature. The immune system activates. You can maybe even cough out some slime spontaneously. Slowly bring the temperature back up to normal. As your body will not quickly detect the change when it happens slow, the effect on your immune system and 'psyche' stays longer, even when the cold temperatures are not there anymore. Keep in mind it is not healthy to really stay long into cold temperatures when sick. <i>(Thinking about that, maybe we should ask Wim Hof for some good advice too)</i></p>

Unless stated otherwise, try to inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth in each of them. Most of the time, each exhale should take about twice as long as the inhale unless stated differently. Subtle details such as timing and internal lung pressure can be important, so a lot of practice is needed before doing things correctly.

You can vary the speed of your breathing (duration of inhale or exhale, breath-hold) between each exercise.

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Please be careful and make sure you do not push this too fast and too far. Certainly if you are already sick: your immune system needs energy.

Also try to keep the speed of your breath itself constant, avoiding slowing down or speeding up at the very end of your inhale or exhale.

Again: not all skills above are critical to know, but the more you know the better you are prepared.

It will at least help you with getting into a panic. Even without corona and pneumonia. And certainly in case you would already be panicking at this moment.

And if at first imperfect, you will get improvement with practice automatically.

Also keep in mind the 'advanced' ones are hopefully 'only' needed in case you ignore 'warnings'

## Theory

I do agree that taking control over your breathing without insight can be dangerous.

Understanding what you are doing can decrease risks. Because of that, I will give a short and simple summary of how I understand the respiratory mechanisms to function. Again: I am not a physician so use this explanation as a reference only. if you spot errors please let me know.

In a normal situation, your lungs extract oxygen ( $O_2$ ) from the air into your blood and remove carbon dioxide ( $CO_2$ ) from your blood into your lungs.

While organs typically 'consume energy' (aerobic), they use  $O_2$  from your blood and replace it by  $CO_2$ .

This increase in  $CO_2$  concentration decreases your blood pH and when your body detects this acidity, it will increase your breathing accordingly. This increased breathing rate will remove  $CO_2$  from your blood into the air and at the same time get more  $O_2$  into your blood. The balance remains healthy.

Your blood uses haemoglobin as a transport mechanism for  $O_2$ . When all blood haemoglobin is bonded with oxygen, we say the blood oxygen saturation has reached 100%.

This saturation can be measured in your arterial blood at the hospital or on your finger with a pulse oximeter

*SIDE NOTE:  $O_2$  can also diffuse directly in blood (as it does directly before being consumed by cells) but because of a low solubility rate does not have any significant effect on blood oxygen availability itself. the effect is even more complicated and has many variables, so please read about dissociation curves and the Bohr-effect to get a more complete picture.*

So in practice it has no benefit to breathe past 100% oxygen saturation, and doing this will mostly remove  $CO_2$  from your blood and create an imbalance. (and can cause hypoventilation)

*NOTE: The amount of haemoglobin proteins in your blood can vary over longer times because of mechanisms of the bone marrow, spleen and other organs. This for example in a short-term reaction to swimming/diving or in a long-time reaction to high altitude conditions. Some medication can also influence this. (I do not know whether your body can increase haemoglobin production enough to partially help mitigate pneumonia symptoms after a few days. )*

However: having a pneumonia or similar conditions, the damage and fluids in your alveoli (lung cells) will vastly decrease the efficiency in which  $O_2$  is extracted from the air, lowering your oxygen saturation level. As your organs do not have access to the quantity of  $O_2$  they need, they can function less (or get damaged) which in turn produces less  $CO_2$ .

As your  $CO_2$  levels stay low, this prevents your sub-consciousness to adapt its breathing rate correctly to the new situation, resulting in a rate which is too slow.

A conscious control of your breathing allows you to take in more  $O_2$  to ensure healthy levels. This happens mostly by increasing the breathing pace and 'deepness'.

However: a major difficulty/danger with conscious breathing control is maintaining an optimal blood pH.

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Specifically: preventing too much CO<sup>2</sup> leaving your body. (*NOTE: Maintaining a correct blood pH balance is also important to safeguard other vital body functions and chemical processes*).

So if you deplete CO<sup>2</sup> levels, your sub-consciousness will have problems determining the correct breathing rate and make you go into hypoventilation (too slow) as it takes time to produce enough new CO<sup>2</sup> to restore the balance.

Using correct breathing techniques and keeping control can prevent this from happening.

After your body has had more experience with breathing exercises, apnea,... you will improve your sensitivity and ability over time, but personally I am not qualified to explain how this works biologically and to my regret cannot really 'guess' how long people need to practice to obtain the right 'skills'.

#### NOTE :

While doing 'my procedure' I used the techniques I learned over the last 10+ years(including burst-breathing and the things I experimented with at high altitudes and during diving).

Sometimes I cannot fully explain to others how to do techniques that I used myself and certainly not how they work. This makes it even harder to make sure I 'teach' all the correct things on the skills page.

As said earlier, I also make the assumption that the risk resulting from a lowered blood CO<sup>2</sup> concentration is much lower during pneumonia than that caused by an insufficient O<sup>2</sup> saturation.

If somebody reading this has a good understanding of these physiological aspects and want to discuss: please contact me so I can learn more and update this document with more accurate 'background theory'.

As said: To me, the theory behind some systema breathing techniques such as breath holds and burst-breathing is difficult to explain accurately. I have practiced (experimented with) and applied enough systema breathing techniques to know they work and help in reality, but internal scientific aspects are normally not explained during a class and I have not studied them myself. I am not an instructor or teacher. But I also want to avoid people using dangerous oversimplifications such as equalling "accelerated breathing" to "hyperventilation". So I will try to give an example. As I understand it(and as said, good systema instructors may have to correct me here), one of the aspects to control is lung pressure. If you increase the pressure of the air inside your lungs, you will also increase the partial pressures of O<sup>2</sup> and CO<sup>2</sup>. This will increase O<sup>2</sup> absorption rate from the lungs into the blood and (certainly at a breath hold) decrease CO<sup>2</sup> extraction speed from the blood to the lungs.

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## **Tools**

### **Oximeter**

As you have read, I have mentioned an oximeter quite a lot. It is probably not essential to have one available, but it makes it a lot easier to check if your methods are working correctly.

I also mainly used it for this purpose, and also to have some objective feedback on my own condition.

Also, my physician had asked me to warn her if values got below 90 and certainly if below 80.

Sadly, my sensor was very slow. And in the 'critical' moments, I often could not even get any reading. So by the time I recovered and was doing continued breathing, I already felt much better.

So I am sure I have missed the lowest values.

Certainly during the first days, it is quite difficult to judge whether your symptoms are caused (solely) by low oxygen values. So it helped me quite well to 'calibrate' myself and have a good idea what was happening inside me.

In case you have no oximeter at hand, I will try to list the feelings I have associated with the saturation values. I also have no idea whether some people are more/less sensitive to the effects of low blood oxygen levels. Please keep in mind that I have not done any research in 'common' or 'scientific' methods to diagnose this, so some symptoms could have been caused by other things happening at the same time. Maybe a physician can help improve my overview later.

There is also a blur between the values close to each other, but I hope they can help you a bit:

*NOTE:*

*the negative symptoms of the levels 'above' continue to be present in the range below, but often more aggravated. I have seen and felt other symptoms too, but it is difficult to put them in a specific range. And some of those where maybe also cause by the virus itself or fever etc.*

Oxygen Saturation level	Personal symptoms
100%, 'oversaturation'	tingles in my arms and legs, feeling full of energy. <b>important note:</b> I use 'oversaturation' as a 'gross' simplification: Oxygen oversaturation is difficult to reach in normal circumstances. The symptoms and condition resulting from breathing too much is actually due to 'hypocapnia', a decrease of CO <sup>2</sup> and not an oversaturation of O <sup>2</sup> . CO <sup>2</sup> diffuses more easily through the lungs than O <sup>2</sup> . So it is easier to maintain a normal CO <sup>2</sup> level than an optimal O <sup>2</sup> level when you have pneumonia, especially for young people. The only way CO <sup>2</sup> levels rise is when we get exhausted by hyperventilation and begin to hypoventilate. <b>Warning:</b> in normal circumstances, your body uses the blood CO <sup>2</sup> level(pH) to determine your breathing rate. So when your CO <sup>2</sup> levels get too low, it will be much more difficult for your sub-consciousness to use correct a correct breathing. ( <i>resulting in a breathing that is too slow = hypoventilation</i> ) <b>NOTE:</b> a correct burst-breathing technique instead of wrong 'hyperventilation' can strongly reduce this risk
95-100%	Feeling fine. Having enough energy to do all basic tasks. <i>I am luckily currently in this range. And the tiredness I still feel has nothing to do with oxygen levels (Monday march 23)</i>
90-94%	feeling uncomfortable and tired. Walking around too much or a short phone call makes me feel tired.
85-89%:	feeling bad and almost dizzy. Some weird headache, mostly in the upper back of my head, near the surface.
80-85%	trouble thinking clearly. Dizzy. Troubling that is it also takes quite some time to get aware of that. Because not being able to think clearly. Repeat. Keep doing oxygenating breathing exercises to avoid getting lower values.
75-80%:	Panic, feeling of going to pass out. Urgent to get out of this. <i>And after I still got hours of pain in my chest. And a massive headache until the end of next day.</i>
<75%	very bad <i>The lowest I measured was 75%. But that was at least 5 minutes(difficult to judge time) after having almost passed out and doing all I could to get out of this. So the following probably caused lower values in me, not sure how low: This happened after typing for a few hours. I started feeling I could not think anymore. I suddenly realized I lost control. But by the time I got up from my chair, I went back down. Not sure if I fell to the ground. I think I saved myself with a quick step, but I am not sure what I did or what happened exactly. My neighbour texted me asking if I was moving out, so it must have been loud. It feels like your heart can stop any moment with beating. You feel it bounce, but no idea what exactly it is doing. My memory is quite blurred about the exact conditions. Try to avoid ever getting this close. Certainly without oxygen nearby. I was one second away of calling an ambulance. Not sure I could have talked clearly enough to explain them anything. It was the trigger for me to stop with my report for now and only focus on my own health. (and follow my own 'my procedure' to the letter)</i>

### WARNING: the table above is made based on personal experience ONLY

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