



Breath Quotient

Observations of
Breath Intelligence



By Dr Ela Manga and Viola Edward

Breathing is far more than the exchange of air. It is a language. It is a reflection of the quality of life force as it is expressed through the body, mind and heart. Every breath that we take mirrors our conscious and unconscious thoughts, the emotions, feelings and sensations that we experience in every moment. The breath can also be a reflection of deeply held emotional trauma, of habitual patterns of tension that have been carried from the moment of conception, or the experience of birth and the conditioning imprinted by family, culture and the journey of life.

Observation of the subtle nuances of our breathing patterns is simply the most obvious and measurable way to observe the mental and emotional fluctuations reflected in our physiology. Through our awareness of the breath as a support for mindfulness and presence, we are offered an entry point to help release unconscious breathing habits that hinder clarity and balance.

Breath Intelligence (BQ) is an experiential set of breathing parameters that we can observe and track in ourselves. It also serves as guidelines for mentors, coaches, therapists and health practitioners in the assessment and monitoring of the breathing characteristics of people they are working with and supporting.

Acknowledging that our breathing reflects of our physical, emotional and spiritual health, the BQ - Breath Intelligence system has been developed as a simple multidimensional guideline for anyone involved in the vast field of conscious breathing, whether to improve and enjoy health, enhance physical performance, develop emotional intelligence and deepen self-awareness. It is another step closer to quantifying one's relationship with breath, and thus life itself, a quality than usually cannot be measured.

BQ - Breath Intelligence is a non-invasive method for assessing the health of the body/mind system, following progress without the use of equipment or wearables. Using these parameters to become aware of the subtleties of respiratory rate, rhythm, volume breathed and breathing patterns opens up a clearer picture of the underlying mental, emotional and physiological states. Knowledge of the effects of conscious breathing practices enables powerful support to the body's natural pull towards balance, homeostasis and harmony.



Please note:

- Any technique or set of breathing exercises that are being practiced should ultimately serve Breath Intelligence.
- These parameters should not be seen in isolation, but rather in the context of all the other parameters.
- Certain conscious breathing practices will seem to override the guidelines below, but are used for very specific purposes of emotional release.
- It is recommended that you use BQ - Breath Intelligence together with someone who has some form of breathwork training and who is able to guide you.
- Disclaimer: These set of parameters are general indicators and do not replace a formal medical diagnosis or treatment.

1. Resting Respiratory Rate.

In general, a resting respiratory rate between 8 to 14 breaths/minute while seated indicates that the body's autonomic nervous system is in balance. The higher the resting respiratory rate, the more likely it is that one is in a state of sympathetic overdrive. The RR naturally diminishes when lying down or when being observed. The objective is to get a picture of the person's habitual breathing patterns during everyday activities. Our respiratory rate is very responsive to stress, temperature, artificial stimulants and medication and can be a good indicator of how the body is responding to various stimuli.

2. Nostril breathing at rest.

Breathing through the nostrils during everyday activities and when at rest is a natural choice. There are also situations when it is very natural to breathe through the mouth, such as when yawning, sighing and when we require more oxygen during singing and exercise. Habitual mouth breathing whilst at rest, leads to what some call 'over breathing', this can fuel the stress response and impact cellular respiration and metabolic function. Habitual breathing through the mouth may indicate an underlying medical condition such as chronic sinusitis or nasal septum deviation. It may also occur as result of a breathing habit that has developed over time.



3. Abdominal expansion on the inhale.

As we inhale and the lungs inflate, the abdomen will bulge out. As we exhale and the lungs deflate, the abdomen should naturally retract. If this pattern is reversed, with the abdomen being sucked in on an active inhale and pushed out on the exhale, it may indicate a compromised diaphragm function or pattern of stress that causes the inhibition of full lung expansion. This can be corrected with training belly breathing.

4. Abdominal vs. Chest breathing.

A common suboptimal breathing pattern is the overuse of smaller and less efficient accessory muscles in the neck and shoulders. These muscles are designed to support the diaphragm when there is an increased demand for oxygen. If there is a pattern of chronic tension in these muscles or the diaphragm is weak, the accessory muscles become chronically overused. We see this pattern of breathing exaggerated when someone is instructed to take in a deep breath. We observe the neck and shoulder muscles tensing, with the shoulders moving up towards the ears, or we notice the chest moving more than the belly when we breathe. Chest breathing results in a high effort to energy ratio. In other words, too much effort is being used to breathe with a poor energy yield and this leads to fatigue.

5. Posture that supports breathing.

Postural habits from prolonged sitting, injuries, certain illnesses, negative thinking patterns, chronic stress, addictive habits and psychological trauma can have a big impact on the way we breathe. Patterns of tension and contraction build up in the fascia restricting breathing and the free flow of energy through the energetic pathways of the body. It is important to become aware of how these postural mannerisms are related to our breathing patterns and to learn how to release them through postural training bodywork combined with breathing practices. The ability to fully relax the body on a conscious exhale without holding residual tension is a sign of good Breath Intelligence. So is the ability to sense that the whole body is involved in breathing and not just the lungs and feel that the body can expand in three dimensions when we breathe, top to bottom, back to front and side to side.

6. Speech.

We can learn to use the breath to power and modulate the rhythm and tone of our voice. The ability to maintain the strength and volume of our voice, even at the end of a breath and the capacity of speaking long sentences on a single breath are signs of Breath Intelligence. A good test is to shout "Hey!" If the belly pops out, rather than contracting inward, it indicates that the diaphragm is collapsing under the weight /force of the voice.

7. Physical exercise.

A good indicator of Breath Intelligence is when we can unconsciously and consciously coordinate our movement with our breathing and can engage our breath in strategic ways to guide or support a physical action. This is usually observed when we are engaged in strenuous activity such as lifting a heavy object or are training at the gym. For example, when someone is doing a crunch they should exhale while crunching to support and maintain consciousness of the body movement.

8. Responsive Breathing.

A sign of high BQ - Breath Intelligence is when the breath feels free and is flexible and adaptable, rather than maladaptive and reactive. A reactive pattern would be when we stop breathing when we're listening, concentrating, texting or holding an emotion. Responsive breathing adapts and flows in a way that serves whatever activity we are engaged in without holding the breath. For example, one should be able to breath continuously during the feeling and the expression of emotions such as anger, sadness, fear, joy and happiness.

9. CO2 tolerance.

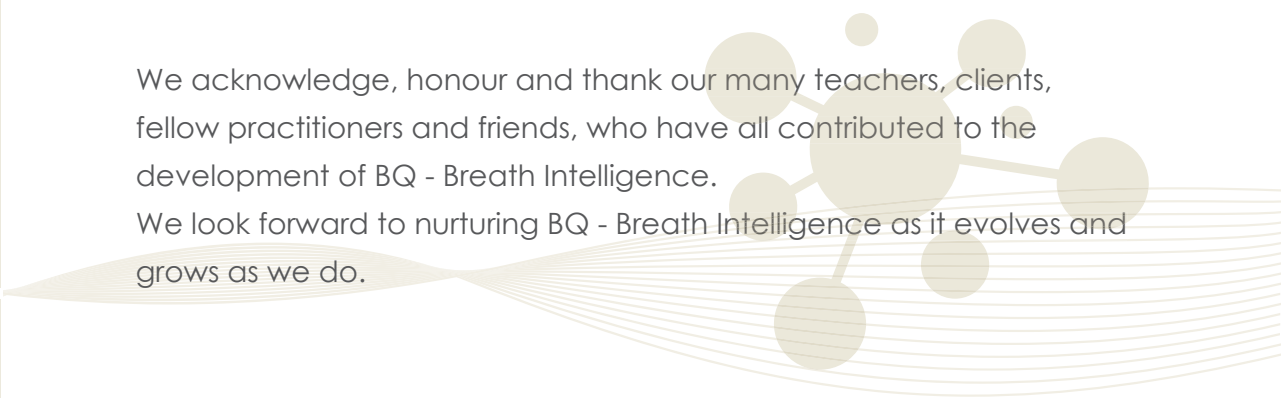
Good tolerance to carbon dioxide in the blood will prevent over breathing and will support calm breathing at rest resulting in improved cellular respiration. To score and assess CO2 tolerance, we can time how many seconds we are able to hold the breath after a normal

exhale before feeling the first urge to breathe. A good BQ - Breath Intelligence indicator is the ability to hold a comfortable pause of 20 seconds after a normal exhalation. The longer we are able to hold the pause, the greater our tolerance to carbon dioxide and the more efficient cellular respiration will be. This test is best done first thing in the morning on waking. Note that conscious breath holding as a test is different from unconscious breath holding which would indicate a suboptimal breathing pattern.

10. Yawns and Sighs.

Both yawns and sighs are natural 'Recovery loops'. They are inbuilt physiological reflexes that boost parasympathetic activity (relaxation response) and are part of the body's natural way of maintaining homeostasis. The expanded inhalation of the yawns and the one that precedes a sigh maintains the integrity of lung expansion. These reflexes can also be used consciously as a technique to aid relaxation and release tension. However, continuous and habitual yawning and sighing that is out of context could indicate dysfunctional breathing pattern, underlying illness or psychological stress.

We acknowledge, honour and thank our many teachers, clients, fellow practitioners and friends, who have all contributed to the development of BQ - Breath Intelligence. We look forward to nurturing BQ - Breath Intelligence as it evolves and grows as we do.





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