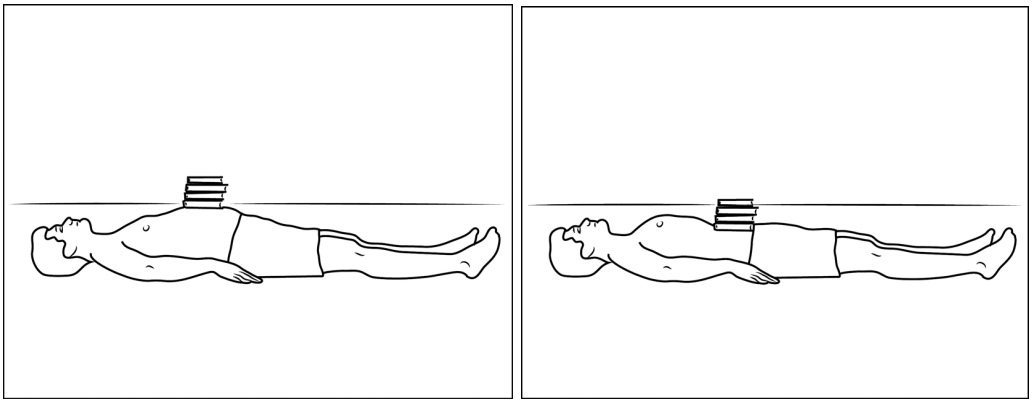
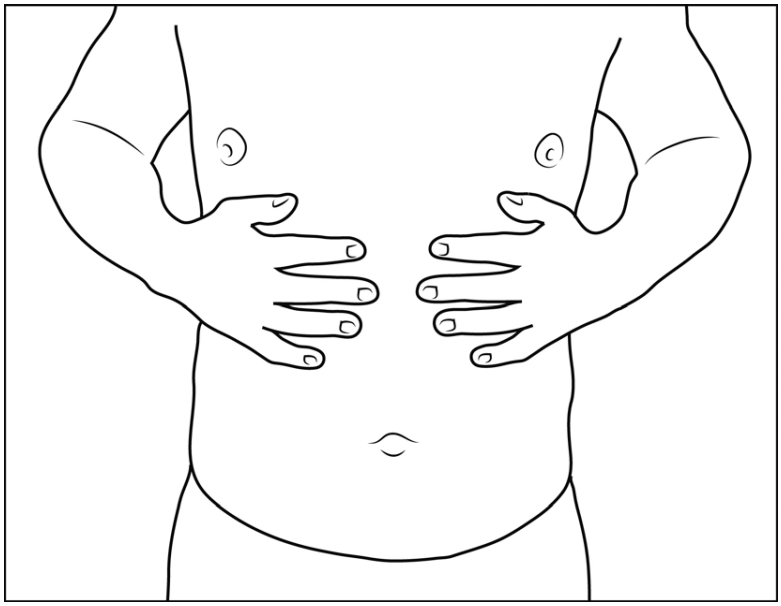
DIAPHRAGM EXTENSIONS

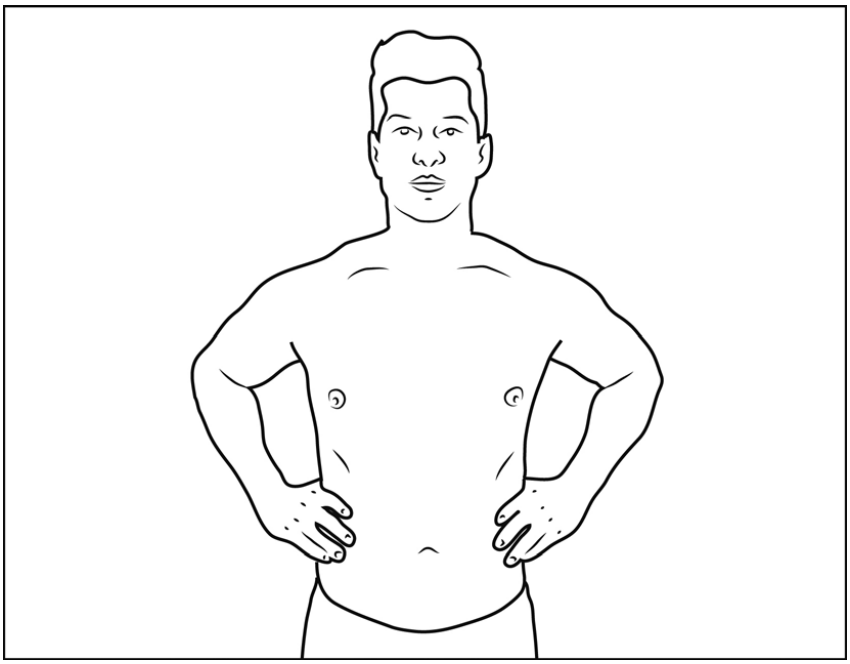


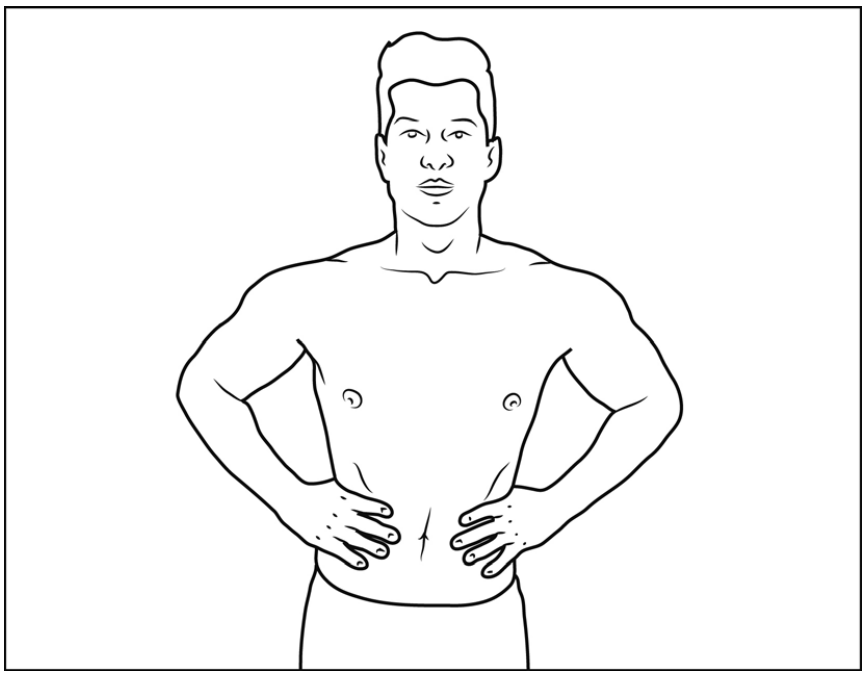
Lie down on your back. Place a large book (or a small stack of small books) on your abdomen, right on top of your belly button. Gaze toward the books—you should be able to see them at the very bottom of your field of vision. Take a belly breath with the goal of making the books rise, and on the exhale, watch them lower. You might find that your hips rotate slightly as you breathe, your lower back coming away from the floor slightly on the inhale. Bring aware ness to and even exaggerate this movement. Go ahead and do 50 repetitions. Don't worry about your pace or counts right now; focus on getting used to the movement.

As you get better at this exercise, you can graduate to heavier books or use a ten- or twelve-pound weight or kettlebell. When using a weight, hold it with one hand and move it to different parts of your middle: 2 inches above your belly button, to the right, then to the left. Keep holding the weight, but focus on pushing it away on the inhale and letting it drop toward you on the exhale. Really let this idea sink in: when you breathe, your middle moves, in both directions, always. Go ahead and do 20 repetitions in 5 different places on your middle.



Now, let's look at the exhale part of this exercise. If you've really got it and are using a heavyweight, focus on letting the weight fall fully down into your body on the exhale, seeing how far you can narrow your waist. The heavier weight will help you achieve this. (This will make the "push up" that comes with the inhale more challenging, but the focus right now is on the exhale. Be careful not to hold your breath or brace). Remember: Let the weight push your belly button down toward your spine. Put the weight aside and see if, when you sit up, you can keep that hollowed out "C"-shape on the exhale. That's your goal.





Frequently Asked Questions

I've heard that my diaphragm contracts—is that on the inhale or exhale?
Forget the word "contracts"; it confuses everyone. Right now, just think that on the inhale, your diaphragm flattens and pushes your ribs open, so that your middle should widen. And then the opposite, on the exhale. It curls closed and narrows your ribs.

Isn't this going to make me gassy?
While this is called a "belly breath," the fact is that air isn't going into your stomach at all. It's still going to your lungs, but now going to the bottom of your lungs, closer to your belly. The bottom of your lungs is where the densest, biggest lung tissue is, where the most exchange of oxygen happens.

What do I do if I find that I get distracted but am continuing to do the correct movement?
This is good news. It means you're starting to acclimate to the new information and don't have to focus as much. *Bravo!*

What happens if I really can't "get" one of these exercises? Am I doomed to be a Vertical Breather forever?
Be gentle with yourself. Remind yourself you've had the bad habit of breathing vertically for years, maybe even decades, which means you've been breathing "wrong" thousands, yes, millions of times. Besides, this method is designed so that you have to find just one exercise that comes easily and work from there—you don't have to be able to "get" all of them initially. The bright side is that your body "wants" to breathe horizontally, and soon will have moments when it "remembers" doing it when you were young.

All exercises were developed by Dr. Belisa Vranich, author of BREATHE**: The Simple, Revolutionary 14-Day Program to Improve Your Mental and Physical Health** and creator of The Breathing Class. For more information about the mechanics and psychology of breathing, check out her book! If you are looking to improve athletic performance, check out Breathing for Warriors: Master Your Breath to Unlock More Strength, Greater Endurance, Sharper Precision, Faster Recovery, and an Unshakable Inner Game.

THE BREATHING CLASS