

Improve Your Breathing Muscles With These

# PILATE DIAPHRAGM EXERCISES

Just as we strength train our hips or hamstrings to improve our leg strength, we can strengthen the muscles used for breathing.

In fact, researchers at the Centre for Sports Medicine and Human Performance at Brunel University in England demonstrated a direct link between the strength of your diaphragm and fatigue during the marathon.

One of the most effective methods for strengthening your diaphragm is using pilates. Pilates help stretch your intercostal muscles and lengthen the spine, which helps improve breathing and running.

## THE HUNDRED



Lie on your back, knees bent, feet flat on the floor. Keep your arms at your sides, palms down. Inhale and lift your head, neck, shoulders, and arms off the ground. Lift your knees and extend your feet so your legs are straight and at a 45-degree angle to the floor. Take five short breaths in and five short breaths out. While doing so, pump your arms, moving them in a controlled up and down manner. Do a cycle of 10 full breaths—each breath includes five inhales and five exhales. After you do 10 complete breaths, you will have completed 100 arm pumps.

**The Payoff:** Teaches controlled breathing, so that your inhales and exhales are balanced. Bonus:



Builds strong abdominals.

## THE SWAN



Lie face down with your palms flat under your shoulders (as if you were going to do a pushup). Look down so your neck is in line with your spine. Inhale and slowly lift your head, neck, shoulders, and chest as you press your hands into the ground. Keep a slight bend in your elbows. As you exhale, slowly lower yourself back down, chest first, then shoulders, neck, chin, and head. To avoid discomfort in your back, concentrate on pulling your shoulders back to open up your chest. Repeat 10 times.

**The Payoff:** Opens up the chest and deepens your lung capacity to correct shallow breathing.

## CHEST EXPANSION



Stand up straight with your feet shoulder-width apart, your knees slightly bent, and your arms at your sides. Inhale and sweep your arms out and up so that your biceps are near your ears and your palms are facing each other. Exhale and lower your arms back down to your sides. Repeat four times, concentrating on breathing deep and opening your chest.

**The Payoff:** Stretches the intercostal muscles (which lie between the ribs), relaxes the shoulders, engages the diaphragm and pelvic floor, and helps balance breathing between the left and right lungs.

