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The Solari Wellness Series: Breathwork – An Easy Way to Improve Well-Being and Health with Skye Birdsall & Dr. Robert Rowen
It is easy to do, it is cheap, and it can do a lot for our wellbeing and our health.

We actually chose this topic because we are seeing an increasing number of reports about the fact that oxygen levels are decreasing in our atmosphere, which obviously is not a good thing. So it seemed like it would be useful to see how we can increase the amount of air and oxygen we breathe in. We’ll begin by discussing breathwork.

For this I am going to interview Skye Birdsall who is with me now. Skye is a yoga guide specializing in trauma a diet coach for chronic illness, a musician, and a sound healer. After that we will also hear from Dr. Robert Rowen about the medical side of things, the importance of oxygen for health, and what we can do to optimize our oxygen utilization.

Skye has spent over a decade studying yoga and healing arts, and she spent her entire life studying all things spiritual and mystical. Her background in music was foundational to her experience with movement, breathwork, energy work, and sound healing.

After spending most of her adult life in chronic pain and poor mental and physical health, she chose to heal herself naturally through yoga and nutrition. She now lives a nomadic lifestyle sharing her passion for healing with people from everywhere.

Skye, welcome to the Solari Wellness Series.

Skye Birdsall: Thank you so much, Brigitte. Thanks for having me.
Mouchet: Would you start by telling us about your story and how you became a breathwork expert?

Birdsall: Sure. I would love to start our session by taking a few breaths together. So wherever you are, if you are able to safely close your eyes or just tune into your body, take a nice deep breath in through your nose, open your mouth, and exhale. Do this two more times. Take a deep breath in through the nose, and exhale out your mouth. One more. Deepest breath yet, and a big exhale.

Take a moment to notice how that felt for you, and welcome yourself to listening and tuning into our message for the day.

My journey is really what I consider the human journey. There are so many of us who are struggling with health out there – whether it is mental or physical.

I started off with a pretty typical SAD (Standard American Diet) diet in life and a pretty unhappy home. So the chronic illness took hold at a very young age, and the mental illness took hold at a young age too. In my teens I was on pharmaceutical drugs for everything – antidepressants, antianxiety, and all of those things. By the time that I became a young adult, I decided to take my health into my own hands. I didn’t want to be that way anymore; I wanted something better for myself. I always had this belief that we could do anything without drugs.

In college I found yoga. The first yoga class I ever took completely changed my life. I had never felt better in my body in my life. I mostly had a lot of pain. That led me down this path of understanding that yoga could heal everything. That was the teaching. It was this elusive thing back then. This was around 2000 or so.

As I started to feel the differences with the change in my diet and all these things, the breathwork started to become the most valuable. After suffering an injury, I couldn’t move so I couldn’t do the yoga poses anymore or exercise like I usually did. I just had to rest. So what do we do when we rest? We get crazy in our minds. If we are just lying down and we have nothing to do, the mind gets really busy.

At that point I had studied yoga enough to where I had learned enough about breathwork. So as I used breathing practices during that time of healing, I recognized how much I could support my healing process.
After a couple of years of rest and various healing modalities, I went out for a run one day after I was starting to feel good and strong, and I went on a four-mile run with no problem at all. That was the first time in my life when I didn’t struggle with my breath.

Even though all of my life I had been into running and I was in marching band and I played trombone – which takes a good amount of breath just to play the instrument – it wasn’t until conscious breathing came in where the biggest shifts started to happen. That is why I have become so excited about this.

In my healing process I found a man named James Humecky and I went to his retreat. He is a transformational bodywork therapist. During his retreat he had a holotropic breathwork session. That was the first time I had experienced this crazy new experience where I was in a group of about 15-20 people, and we were doing this heavy breathing exercise, and all of these emotions were coming out. Super-loud sounds were coming out of people – primal sounds. We were tapping into a type of our humanity that I had never experienced before. People went into some big releases, and they were crying afterwards. Bodies were doing things that they don’t normally do in that style.

What I experienced is I felt the connection and the oneness that yoga teaches. Yoga teaches that all is one. I didn’t feel that until I did the breathwork. I didn’t discover that on the yoga mat.

Most people get on the yoga mat and do all of these poses, and a lot of teachers don’t really teach about breath; they just run through these sequences of exercises. So that was the biggest shift for me, and that is why I am so excited to share more of my experience and to just encourage everyone to take on this practice.

**Mouchet:** That is very inspiring. Thank you for sharing that.

Can we talk a little bit more about the effects of breathing on the body – specifically and the potential effects on health as well? We know that breathing brings oxygen to the cells, but it does much more than that, right?

**Birdsall:** Absolutely. The most magical thing about our bodies is that we are light and we are energy. Each and every cell needs oxygen to produce the energy that we need to function. That is the most basic level, and that is the most basic level of survival. But when we start to focus on using the breath, what we can do is not only work with the levels of serotonin in our brains, but we can work with the levels of the dopamine and all of these hormones that really help our mood.
That one really supports the body to be happier, more relaxed, and when the body is more relaxed, it functions more efficiently. So we have a much better digestive process, we are able to control our heart rate, and we are able to release tension and access more areas of healing.

What happens unconsciously when we breathe? For example, what happens when we are sitting at a desk? The mind is focused somewhere else, and there is no attention on the body. What we do is we breathe only the bare minimum – just enough to stay alive. That in itself keeps us functioning at the bare minimum. So our bodily functions actually start to slow down so much that things like digestion and mood are affected. Those are two really big ones.

One practice that can be really helpful for this and really simple is to breathe in through the belly. Most people breathe from their upper chest, but when we learn how to breathe into the belly, not only do we start to move all of the fluids in our body, but the organs actually get stimulated. Stimulation of the organs is similar to going and exercising.

In my yoga classes sometimes I would say to my students, “These poses are just to trick you to start breathing. I just want you to get breathing. I don’t really care if you can do a handstand. I don’t really care if you can do a backbend. What matters is if you are breathing. The breath does more work than anything else could do.”

When we use the breath to get into the organs and the body and we actually consciously connect to those, then the functioning starts to activate. We know that the belly is the second brain. So if we are breathing into the belly, we are activating energy in the belly, and we are activating the life force in the belly. We are activating the serotonin and all of the good hormones that really bring us to life. We are activating the endorphins, and we are not stressing out the body that way.

When we access breathing in a stressful way – like maybe we go for a run and we are breathing really heavily – that actually raises adrenaline and cortisol, the stress hormones. So when we are just sitting and breathing deeply we can access a greater healing environment in the body by doing that.

So those are just a few things. Do you have other questions on that one?

**Mouchet:** Yes. Is that what people call the ‘rest and digest’ state?
Birdsall: Exactly! So we can use the breath to get the body into that state of ‘rest and digest’. What you might start to notice is that maybe you are in a breath session, maybe you are sitting and breathing for ten minutes. You might notice that you start to salivate. That is a good indicator that you have moved into the parasympathetic nervous system.

Other ways to feel that is just noticing maybe your sinuses start to clear up because you are in a state of rest and you start to feel those fluids move out of the sinus cavities. Other indicators of being in ‘rest and digest’ would be that you start to feel the tension in your body start to melt away.

Deep belly breathing will also access the vagus nerve. The vagus nerve is one of the big topics in trauma and healing trauma. On some level trauma is a big spectrum. Maybe we are a little stressed out. That is the basic form of trauma – being stressed all the way to what I worked with with severe PTSD. There is big spectrum of, “How do we help people relax their bodies and get back into a state of harmony?”

By using the breath, we are able to activate the nerves, the nervous system, and say hello to those parts of ourselves that get left behind when we are stressed out.

Mouchet: So breathing and movement – would it be a good time to touch on that? It seems like movement is very intimately connected to breathing. I suppose that yoga teaches a lot about that, right?

Birdsall: Absolutely. As I mentioned, when you go for a jog, you might be breathing pretty heavily. You might actually start to breathe through the mouth because it’s a little easier to breathe through the mouth. But when we can do a movement which is a little bit more slow and focused on moving with the breath – let’s say that you are inhaling and reaching the arms up and exhaling to let the arms come back down – it is a very different experience of breath and movement. I just want to make that distinction.

In yoga we practice focusing on each time there is an inhale there is a movement, and each time there is an exhale there is a movement. That in itself gets you to actually feel and become more conscious of what is happening – whether it’s your joints or your limbs. That will start to help move energy through you.
I say ‘energy’ and we will get deeper into that, but what we are working with when we work with the breath and the body is an entire energy field. So you will start to notice different shifts when you begin to stretch certain muscles. If you are not breathing, you could either harm yourself, or maybe not stretch as deeply. The breath can help you to gage where your body can and will open and therefore make more space for more breath.

**Mouchet:** So it’s like being more aware and being more present in what you are doing, whether it is exercise or being at work or even in a conversation, right?

**Birdsall:** Yes, it can be. One of my favorite books is *Bodymind* by Ken Dychtwald. It’s an older book. In the beginning he gives a picture to the reader of the kind of human that takes his body out for a walk as much as he would a pet. It’s like taking a dog for a walk. That is a little bit of what we see in the western culture in going to a gym. You put your headphones on, and you just start running on the treadmill. There is no connection there. There is no connection to the body. So this is a huge shift for us to think, “Oh, I should take the headphones off. I am going to breathe and move with my body. That will be a completely different experience from just running on a treadmill and breathing hard.”

It’s something that we can’t really teach anybody until you try it for yourself.

**Mouchet:** I think that when you do that, you don’t only give oxygen to your cells, but you also give life force that has a certain intention. You can add intention to your breathing, and that is much more powerful. It is adding the consciousness aspect of things into the breathing process.

**Birdsall:** This is where we can get to that place where the western mind thinks this way and has operated this way until yoga came in. Yoga came in and started to really shift the way that Westerners looked at the body-mind connection. In the east they call it ‘prana’ (breath). It’s life force. It’s chi. There are so many words for this life force, but in the west we simply call it ‘breath’ or ‘energy’. They are really the same thing – breath and energy.

When we start to do a practice like yoga or qigong or these more healing arts and practices, we are working with energy. It’s just a mental shift. It’s really just a different way to look at it, but it creates such a different experience for the person doing the practice.
It is going back to that idea of: Are we taking our body out for a walk like we would with a pet, or are we actually in our bodies and doing something? That is when we start to feel a difference in the energy flow.

Once we start to know these things mentally and have some sort of understanding and then we do the practice, then we can start to experience what is different about simply breathing in and breathing out or adding in your intentions, adding the emotions behind it that you want to feel, noticing the emotions that you feel, and then working with them.

**Mouchet:** I think that is a good introduction. Now can you think about some examples from your life or from your clients where with breathwork you have been able to make a change either to a physical condition or mental/emotional? Can you think of some examples where breathwork really changed that?

**Birdsall:** Yes. In my own experience, as I mentioned earlier, I suffered with depression. I went to a workshop with Gary Kraftsow. We sat and did a bunch of different pranayama exercises. One was the breath retention exercise. We would inhale, hold the breath in for anywhere from five to twenty counts of breath, and then exhale. After an extended period of practicing that, I started to experience a state of bliss. It had lifted me. I am imagining that the serotonin and the endorphins in my body had lifted to such a high state that I felt that I was almost on some sort of drug. I was really high and happy.

Just by simply having that experience of knowing that the breath can bring me into a state of joy just by breathing, that is when the shift became personal to me. That is when I started to really understand.

In my yoga classes over the years my students would just be so grateful that I was supporting them to actually breathe because they always reflected back to me saying, “This feels so much better because you are reminding me to breathe. What I am realizing is that I don’t breathe very much,” or, “I don’t breathe very deeply.”

There is a whole awareness that happens when somebody realizes that they don’t breathe very much. So that in itself – that shift of awareness – can start to give them an understanding of how important it is.
I am working with a client right now who has psoriatic arthritis. First we started with diet, but I just recently added in the breathwork for him. The reason why I added it in was because he is a stressed out person. He is a busy guy. He is a single dad with four children, he runs his own business, and just the nature of his life developed this condition of super-high inflammation.

I sent him a video of a few practices, which is what we will do later, and he has noticed that it helps him just to stay calm. It helps him to find that state of ‘rest and digest’ even when he doesn’t have time to necessarily go to a yoga class. We don’t have to go to yoga classes; we can breathe while we are driving to our next appointment.

He mentioned that he stays much calmer throughout the day, and just knowing that that tool is there and available has been really helpful for him to find that calm.

**Mouchet:** It has probably removed some stress from his life.

**Birdsall:** Exactly. He now has somewhere to go when he feels the stress come instead of going for a coffee or a candy bar or something like that.

**Mouchet:** It puts you back in control of your life and your condition. Have you seen any effects from this on the physical body with him or somebody else? I suppose that less stress would help.

**Birdsall:** With the physical body, the main thing that I experience – and a lot of people experience – is this feeling lighter. When you think about a tense body that maybe doesn’t move very much, the energy becomes dense. There is stagnation in the sedentary lifestyle. So when there is the practice of breathing and movement, then the energy becomes lighter. It is freer because it is moving through us.

I see that in a lot of people. Students at the end of class are lighter because they have had all of this time to breathe with movement. It’s pretty simple, and yet it’s so powerful.

**Mouchet:** That makes sense.

Do you think that with breathing and using the mind and the intention we could direct the energy to affect the way that the body is working and use it as a healing tool? Do you see that? Have you experimented with that?
We often hear, “Where the mind goes, the energy flows.” So I suppose that people are using that as a healing tool. Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

**Birdsall:** Yes. “Where the mind goes, energy flows.” So maybe just take a moment and experience that for yourself. Think about something that you are not happy about. Feel in your body something that you are not happy about. What do you notice? Some of you might be clenching your jaw. Some of you might feel a knot in your stomach. Some of you might feel tension in the eyebrows. Notice your breathing. How are you breathing when you think about something that is not making you happy right now?

Now take a breath, and when you feel ready, just smile. Now think about something that makes you happy – even if it’s an imaginary thing. Notice what is happening in your body when you invite happiness and joy into your body. What are you smiling about? Do you feel your belly release the tension? Can you soften your belly easier? Are you breathing more deeply now?

Usually when there is a state of joy, there is a sigh of relief. So when we smile and bring the energy of happiness into the body, you can feel it almost instantly how the energy shifts.

Relax out of that when you are ready. We will talk a little bit more about that. Now you have just experienced how powerful your mind is to change your energy and how simple it is.

Very often we will use visualizations and we will use intentions and we will use any sort of tool of the mind. It’s body, mind, and spirit. The body is all of these things and all of these functions that we have. The physical body carries tension and gets stressed out and gets sick and gets all of these things. It breathes and does all of these things, but until we add in the mental and the spirit, or some people might feel more comfortable thinking about the emotional aspect, we tie all of those things together. Then we are really starting to practice something different. That is what the eastern philosophies have brought to us – this practice of energy shifting into the awareness that we are actually in control.

**Mouchet:** That is very empowering.

**Birdsall:** Yes! It is so empowering. What we all so desperately need is to reclaim our sovereignty and our power as humans, and to know that we don’t need to rely on the pharmaceutical industry or doctors or too many external sources. We can first start with this practice of breath. “How do I feel? How do I want to feel?”
By bringing that intention in, the intention can shift. Let’s try another one. If you can, just simply try this: Inhale love, and exhale fear. That is bringing in an intention.

I would joke with my students all the time, “Where are you? Are you thinking about your Starbucks date afterwards, or are you still here breathing?” Then I would invite them back. “Breathe in love, exhale fear.”

Maybe it is a different intention for you. Maybe you are breathing in joy and exhaling sadness. The intentional part can be very simple and so powerful.

**Mouchet:** Thank you. You studied sound healing, right?

**Birdsall:** Yes.

**Mouchet:** Do you integrate sound with your breathwork? Are there any additional benefits when you do that?

**Birdsall:** What I love about sound healing is that sound is such an inherent and ancient healing modality, and live sound is extremely powerful because it is done by a person with an intention and their heart and emotions. So whether it’s crystal singing bowls or gongs, it helps the body move into that state of ‘rest and digest’. So we are doing a physical practice that is moving into ‘rest and digest’, and then there is an external force creating a container for the people who are having that experience. It’s like setting an energetic space for the energy to flow with the intention by the people who are playing the music.

I have been in breathwork sessions where there was a recorded soundtrack, and it was nice. There was still benefit, but after experiencing the difference between the two, I would always choose a live sound healing. The vibrations are set to activate different chakras. They are set to activate different organs. Gongs will help to move the brain into the beta state, which is a healing state.

Sound healing on its own is extremely powerful, but when the person is also actively moving into that state of healing, it is much more powerful.

You have been to a sound healing before, right?

**Mouchet:** Yes.
Birdsall: Have you ever had a difficult time resting during the sound healing because your mind was busy?

Mouchet: No.

Birdsall: Good! A lot of people have said to me that sometimes it takes 20-30 minutes just to get the mind to stop if they are just resting in a sound healing. But when we do sound healing and breathwork, then we are getting the mind into the body. We are getting the fluctuations of the mind, and the mental activity has a chance to go away because the breath becomes the focus.

Mouchet: I heard that you cannot think and breathe at the same time. Is that right?

Birdsall: I would agree, but you have to try it yourself. I always experience that. When I recognize that my mind is too busy, it is because I have stopped breathing, or vice versa. Which one came first? Did my mind get busy, or did I stop breathing? Sometimes I ask myself that question because we often just don’t think about the breath.

We know that we can go about 30 days without food. We can go about three days without water. We know this, but we can’t go more than three minutes without the breath.

Mouchet: Maybe seven minutes for some rare people.

So what about singing and or humming? Can you tell us more about that?

Birdsall: That is another vagus nerve practice. That is the first thing that comes to mind. When the vocal cords are vibrating, you can use your own vocal cords as your tuning fork for your body. They are vibrating at a frequency that your body needs; you don’t even have to think about it.

I experienced the deepest sleep after humming for 30 minutes, and it was the best sleep I’ve had in a long time. It is a controlled breathing practice to be able to hum for a long time. It’s an exhalation. The exhalation brings the body into ‘rest and digest’.

So if you are exhaling with your own sound and your own physical vibration, you can’t help but have every single cell just so happy.
Mouchet: And you can probably ask your body what it needs, right? It may take a little bit of training, but it is possible. The body should know.

Birdsall: Absolutely. The intentions that you carry are the most powerful thing that you have. What I have noticed is one time I was in an energy healing session. I noticed that I wasn’t feeling the energy moving.

First of all, I wasn’t breathing enough. I recognized that. Then I had to actually intend for the energy to move. I actually told my body, “Open, relax, and receive.”

Afterwards, when I talked to the practitioner, she said that she felt it, too. She said, “At first, I was processing the energy for you. Then at some point the energy finally did start to move through you.”

That was a confirmation of the intention that we have to let energy move. If I didn’t breathe, I wouldn’t have felt it. If you are not breathing, then you are probably not feeling your body.

Mouchet: Do you want to say more about breathing and emotions? We talked about that a little bit already. I don’t know if you have any more to say about that. I feel that it is really important because emotions have a big impact on health, and breathing is such an easy way to deal with them instead of just ignoring them. Do you have more to say there?

Birdsall: I would love to elaborate a little bit on anxiety and depression and anger or frustration. That may sound like a lot, but that covers a pretty wide range of experience.

Essentially when you are depressed, you are thinking about the past. When you are anxious, your mind is busy and worried about the future. So that in itself is a whole package of repressed or suppressed emotions. Our society doesn’t give us much space to process emotions at all.

So in a workshop with Gary Kraftsow, who I mentioned before, we talked about the difference between when we are working with a client, and say that our client is anxious. Well, the practice is very different from a client who is depressed. This is very important for people to feel and work with within their own bodies.
Breathwork can be really great for many things, but some of these practices are very specific for anxiety, and some are very specific for depression. If we don’t do the right one, it could aggravate the symptoms. So I want to stress that.

Let’s say that you are anxious, and then you go see Wim Hof or something, and you practice this hyperventilating method, and it’s really intense. That could aggravate the anxiety unfortunately. So that could be fun for someone who is depressed because it is uplifting energy.

Think about it in terms of energy. Depression is a very downward-focused energy. It’s an energy that brings you into stagnation and moves you towards the past or towards ‘stuckness’. The way out of that is to breathe in more – more inhalation and more excitement of the cells. Maybe you breathe faster and you are moving faster with your breath with very quick movements with your breath. Maybe you need to go for a jog and breathe heavily.

Anxiety is quite the opposite. An anxious person really benefits from long exhalations and soothing music to go along with those longer exhalations that will help to bring them back to the present moment and remember that they are okay in the space. Anxiety in that realm of worry and depression makes me think of grief and sadness and all of those things.

Then somewhere in the middle is anger and frustration. That is a fiery place to be that causes a lot of tension in the body. Maybe for someone with anger you might have a very simple practice. Just breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out. It’s very balanced to help bring that person back to balance and start to release some tension.

You can feel that pretty instantly when you think about what it feels like in your body to be angry. It’s tense and tension. So you need the breath to move that through us.

**Mouchet:** That is very, very important to be aware of that and to know what to do and what not to do in those situations.

Is there more that you want to say about breathing and consciousness? Is there more to say about that before we do some breathing exercises?

**Birdsall:** What comes to mind that I would like to touch on is the fear factor. Sometimes it takes really intense experiences to actually be in the moment. Imagine that you are coming up on something that you are afraid of. It awakens you to that moment. It makes you gasp. What happens in the reaction is a big inhale.
Consciousness can be a pretty illusive term. It is very broad. If you just keep it simple, everything is conscious. What matters is the state of consciousness that you want to have in your life. When you are living a very safe, routine life that is sedentary and nothing is really awakening you to the ‘now’ moment, you can study what the ancient yogis were bringing to us, “Breath is consciousness. Breath will make you aware. Breath will bring you into the moment.”

Hopefully we don’t have to have fearful experiences or intense experiences all the time to awaken us to, “Yes, I do want to live.” When I think of being afraid, it might be because my life was just challenged in that moment. It makes you gasp, “Oh, I’ve got to pay attention. I have got to waken up to this moment.”

So there are really simple ways that we can look at consciousness. What is consciousness? It’s whether we are awake or asleep, whether we are alive or we are dead. If we are not breathing, we are dead. If we stop breathing, the consciousness goes away.

We can play with consciousness with breath, too. That is how holotropic breath works. As I mentioned before, I had this experience of oneness. There is no other way to describe it; I just had the feeling and sensation.

There are lots of people who have shared stories that it felt like a psychedelic experience for them. They went off into a different realm. They had visions and almost like a dream-like state. It brought them to a completely different state of awareness.

There are many ways that you can look at what consciousness is and the breath, and that is what is so exciting. Until you try it, it is an experience.

**Mouchet:** It can be a trip, right?

**Birdsall:** It’s a trip.

**Mouchet:** Could you talk a little bit about how we can integrate this into our lives? I think that if we don’t develop a practice it’s easy to forget about it very quickly and go back to our old ways of not breathing very much. So what do you recommend so that something sticks and so that we really benefit from getting more oxygen into the body? We can do whatever we need to do with it, but what would be your recommendation so that we learn from this and we don’t forget about breathing? Is there a best time to practice or a best place to practice so that we can get as much oxygen as possible into the body?
Birdsall: Yes. I would begin with asking yourself the question, “What is the problem in my life that I want to solve right now, and when does it show up?”

If I’m having trouble sleeping, use the breath to support sleep. I will start there. If sleeping is a struggle for you, set the intention to take five minutes before you go to bed to breathe. Maybe humming is also in the practice. There are many ways that we can do that.

I would suggest that if you would like to breathe, use the breath to help you sleep better – whatever you need to do to remind yourself. Sometimes creating a new habit is challenging. They say that 21 days helps you to create a new habit. You have to do it consistently. It starts with the awareness that there is a problem, and then there is the intention to change that problem. That in itself is the first step.

How do I do that? Can I make this a practice? Can I commit?

Once that commitment is there, set yourself a timer. Maybe for five minutes inhale deeply – maybe to a count of four – and then exhale twice as long. Exhale to a count of eight. That is a really simple way to help your body get into ‘rest and digest’. Inhale to a four-count, pause for a breath or two or a moment or two, and then exhale twice as long as you inhale. If you can even do that for one minute, that can help you sleep a lot deeper.

If your problem is the opposite where you have trouble waking up in the morning and you have trouble because you keep hitting the ‘snooze’ button, I’m not sure how to correct the problem of hitting the ‘snooze’ button, but maybe your alarm says something like, “Time to breathe.” Maybe before you get out of bed, you realize, “I need to take a moment and breathe.” Again, it could just be one minute long. Take a full deep breath in, hold it in for a moment, and then sigh it out.

Our dream state sometimes has a lot of things going on – especially if you didn’t get a good night’s sleep or you are just feeling sluggish in general. For whatever reason, the breath can help you awaken to the day.

I would say to choose where you see the problem in your day, set a timer, and then use one of the practices that we go over during this talk or in the video that is coming up next.

Remember this: Inhaling more and focusing on more oxygen to oxygenate those cells will wake you up. Exhaling longer will help you rest.
Let’s say that you are getting tense in the middle of the day. Maybe around 10 o’clock you are already dozing off because you are getting stressed out about work, you are feeling tense at your desk, and you are realizing that you just want to snack on things at your desk or you want more coffee or whatever it is. Instead of doing that, remind yourself by putting a note on your wall in your office to use the breath first. Maybe you need to stand up. Maybe you need to do a few jumping jacks to get your body breathing again. That will help you to start to awaken.

If you are snacking, make sure that it is some fruit or something healthy. You can also use foods. We didn’t talk much about foods for oxygen, but if you bring in live foods, they carry life force energy. Maybe they don’t necessarily carry oxygen in the way that we think about it, but they do carry prana, and that is a life force energy that is so important. Those foods, like having an apple in the middle of a day, the crunching sounds and the eating of the apple can wake you up better than a cup of coffee, but it requires the awareness.

The biggest thing is to make the decision that you want to make a change, and then the changes will come. The tools are there.

**Mouchet:** Very nice. Thank you.

Could you use breathing for detoxification as well? I think that I heard something about that.

**Birdsall:** When we exhale, we are releasing CO2 or carbon dioxide. That in itself is carrying toxins out from the organs and out from the blood. It is helping to cleanse and purify. So just by simply knowing that, hopefully that makes it a little bit more important to breathe. And exhale fully. As I mentioned, just by knowing that the exhalation brings you into a state of ‘rest and digest’ it is actually also digesting and reusing some of those toxins that you have absorbed throughout the day.

**Mouchet:** Shall we do the breathing exercises again?

**Birdsall:** That sounds good. Let’s begin with belly breathing. Just as something to be aware of, the diaphragm moves downward. There is a diaphragm that is right beneath the ribs, and there is a diaphragm at the base of the pelvis. When you breathe in, those diaphragms move down. They create a little bit of compression on the organs. That is why it is so important to belly breathe.
Wherever you are, if you want to join us now or just listen, take a moment and soften your belly. From that place of softening, just begin to exhale. Feel the belly start to curl slightly in. Now inhale towards the naval, and feel the naval push forward. Inhale, inhale. Now exhale and feel the naval draw back slightly towards the spine.

Now imagine that you are blowing up a balloon on the inhale. Feel your belly expand in 360 degrees, and then slowly exhale.

If it’s a little challenging to do this, it’s okay. The more that you practice, the better you will get. Again, inhale into the belly. Feel the belly expand all 360 degrees. Then slowly exhale. So this is breathing practice number one. This is yoga breathing number one: Belly breathing.

**Mouchet:** And what is the benefit?

**Birdsall:** The benefit is to bring the body into ‘rest and digest’ because you are stimulating the organs and stimulating the lower half of the spine. The lower half of the spine and the organs and the pelvis are all related to ‘rest and digest’. That is physically where we are digesting. So the breathing stimulates and awakens those activated centers and those nerves and helps them to remember what they are doing. If we are always holding our energy somewhere else, those organs slow down; they are not as active.

**Mouchet:** When would you do this?

**Birdsall:** I try to breathe in my belly every day all day long. The more that we practice this the less we are breathing in the upper chest because that is the most common place where people breathe. See if you can’t shift that. Every time that you notice, “My shoulders are a little tense,” or, “I am breathing into my upper chest,” relax your shoulders and breathe into the belly. It should help you to stay more relaxed and more in your body and more present.

**Mouchet:** Good.

**Birdsall:** In my opera class when I was in college my opera singer teacher told me that I was doing too many abdominal exercises because my voice was not opening. She said, “You can’t take a deep breath. You can’t sing. You need to stop doing your Pilates every morning.”
It was a really hard thing for me to accept because that was how I stayed healthy and happy, by working on my flat abs. That is really what this society has stressed for so many generations now. Unfortunately, that cuts us off from our belly breathing. It also really restricts the organs.

So, I encourage you wherever you are in your physical health, start to allow your belly to soften and you will notice that vital energy moving.

This belly breath is really the foundation of all breath practices. Practice balancing breath, something that is going to allow us to focus. So in the middle of the day when you are getting distracted and your mind is getting busy, and maybe you are feeling a little tired, in order to bring ourselves back to focus, we do a practice called Nadi Shodhana, or alternate nostril breathing.

By bringing one hand up to the face, you can use your thumb and your ring finger or pinky finger to close off one nostril and then the other. I like to put my index finger and middle finger on my forehead – on my third eye center – and use the thumb and ring finger to close off the nostrils.

We will begin by taking a deep breath into both nostrils and exhaling out both nostrils. Then close off the left nostril and breathe in through the right. Pause, close the right nostril, and breathe out through the left. Pause, and inhale through the left nostril again. Close the left nostril, and breathe out through the right. Inhale through the right, close the right nostril, and exhale through the left. Inhale through the left, close the left nostril, and exhale through the right.

One last full round here: Inhale through the right, close the right nostril, and exhale through the left. Inhale through the left side, close the left nostril, and exhale through the right.

Relax your hand down, and take a deep breath into both nostrils, and exhale. Now take a moment to notice how that felt for you. Has anything shifted?

Mouchet: It is very calming.

Birdsall: Yes, and it is very centering. Yoga teaches us how the energy moves through the body. The right side being the Ida channel, and the left side being the Pingala. The right side, the energy moves up through the body, and on the left side the energy moves down. Sometimes we just think of it as masculine and feminine or sun side and moon side.
Mouchet: Which one is up, and which one is down?

Birdsall: The right side the energy moves up, and the left side the energy moves down. As you notice in the practice, we did both. That is why it helps to balance the energy. You are giving both sides a chance to move equally. You inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale on each side. That helps us to find that center.

Breath of fire: As we talked about when we exhale, we are releasing carbon dioxide. We are releasing toxins and whatever is going on in there. It could be a lot of stuck emotions. Toxic energy can be both emotional and physical.

Kapalabhati is the Sanskrit for this one. As I mentioned before, I wouldn’t suggest this one for someone who is really anxious or extra tired. This one can create a lot of heat in the body. That is why it is called ‘breath of fire’. We are creating heat to really activate the body in general and bring that life force into awareness and activation.

So let’s take a moment to exhale. Then inhale. Just try one big short and forceful exhale. See how that works.

What we are going to do now is only exhale. Don’t even think about the inhale. Just focus on exhaling. Try that twice.

We will do that ten times, then take a break, take a breath, and then another ten times. Nice and slow.

Again, release all of the breath out, inhale, and exhale. Exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, and deep breath in, and relax.

Now that we have the rhythm I will guide us through one more time. Inhale, and exhale. Exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale. Big inhale, and soften and relax. How did that one feel?

Mouchet: It clears the head.

Birdsall: Yes. It clears the sinuses, clears the head. Do you notice your mental energy?

Mouchet: Yes. I think that there is more space and vitality up there.
Birdsall: Great! Awesome. Maybe that is another one that is great for the middle of the day when you are feeling distracted. Maybe you would prefer that one.

I wouldn’t suggest that one for pregnant people. If you are pregnant, the breath of fire is not the best and not the safest. Also for those of you who might have heart conditions it may not be safe. Be gentle with yourself with these more intense practices.

Now I will move onto something that can either uplift or relax down. This is good to practice for yourself and see which one feels better. One, as I mentioned before, might be better for anxiety or depression, but only you will know.

This one is called viloma, and viloma means going against the grain. When we go against the grain, you learn how to actually control the energy in our body. Energy and breath are the same thing. So we are controlling the breath and controlling the energy.

When you are ready, exhale all of the breath out of your belly, and take just a small sip of breath. Inhale just one-third. Then inhale the second third, and then inhale the last third. Then a slow, long exhale, and draw the breath out.

Inhale one third, another third, and inhale the final third, and a slow, long exhale.

We will do it a little slower this time. Inhale one third and hold, inhale the second third and hold, inhale the final third and hold, and a slow exhale. Now return to a natural breath and notice how that felt for you.

We will try the opposite, and then we will talk about how the changes are.

This time, when you are ready, take a full, deep breath in. Exhale one-third, exhale the second third, and exhale the final third. Good. Take a full, deep breath in. Exhale one third, exhale the second third, and exhale all of the breath out of the final third.

One more time. Take a full, deep breath in. Exhale one third, and another third, and then the final third. Then return to a natural breath.

Now take a moment to see and notice how those two felt for you. They have a very different effect. You can experience them differently from the next person. So one person might experience the first one as stimulating, and another person might experience the first one as relaxing. It’s the same with the second breath. I’ve seen that happen with all of them. It is really unique to what your needs are.
That is why it is so fun to explore all of these different practices and find out which one really works for you and why, and what is it that you want to feel?

**Mouchet:** That is really interesting. The relaxing one was stimulating and energizing for me – the second one.

**Birdsall:** See how different it can be. Some people might experience that as relaxing.

**Mouchet:** That is wonderful. Thank you. I think that is enough for now in terms of breathing practices.

Is there anything else that you want to recommend?

**Birdsall:** I just want to remind everyone of the one that I mentioned a little earlier, of the inhaling for four counts and exhaling for eight counts.

**Mouchet:** That is very relaxing, right?

**Birdsall:** Yes. Let’s do that one a few times. This would be closer to my second-favorite breathing exercise. It’s a really important one.

Take a moment to relax, and then take an inhale for four counts. Hold for the count of two or three, and then exhale for eight counts. Take one full, long breath out – twice as long as the inhale.

Inhale for one, two, three, four, and hold for three, two, one. Exhale for eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one. Inhale one, two, three, four, and hold three, two, one. And exhale eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one. Last time: Inhale one, two, three, four. Hold three, two, one. Exhale eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one. Take a nice, deep breath in, and let it out.

**Mouchet:** I like that one.

**Birdsall:** It’s a nice one. So you can choose a couple of different ones. Play with them and try them out. Everyone needs different things.

**Mouchet:** Absolutely. Thank you for these wonderful exercises.
We are going to post a video of just these breathing exercises so that you can go back and look at them when you have forgotten about them and you want to refresh your memory. We will post that in the ‘Resources’ section.

**Birdsall:** It sounds great.

**Mouchet:** Any final thought on the breathing or breathwork before we talk with our second speaker of the day?

**Birdsall:** I would just say to keep it simple. There are so many practices to choose from. Just breathe. If you want to go deeper into it, great. Just remember to breathe. Keep it simple.

**Mouchet:** That is very simple. Thank you.

**Birdsall:** Thank you.

**Mouchet:** So this is really wonderful information that you can immediately incorporate into your life and start watching the benefits. Thank you for sharing so much of what you have learned on this topic. We really appreciate it.

**Birdsall:** Thank you so much.

**Mouchet:** You are welcome.

Now let’s talk with Dr. Robert Rowen and get his perspective on breathing, oxygen, and health.

Dr. Rowen has been practicing medicine for more than 30 years. He graduated in medical school at the University of California San Francisco and received board certification in family practice and emergency medicine.

Finding that pharmacological medicine could do more harm than good, Dr. Rowen made the leap to integrative medicine in the 1980’s. Dr. Rowen has been a pioneer in oxidation therapy, chelation therapy, and IV nutritional therapy. He works with nutrition and diet, and looks at energetic disturbances to the body such as surgical scars and dental lesions.
Dr. Rowen has successfully treated problems from acute and chronic pain to Lyme and associated diseases, chronic infections, autoimmune diseases, heart disease, heavy metal poisoning, mysterious ailments, mold illnesses, digestive disorders, degenerative joint and vertebral conditions, and more.

Dr. Rowen, welcome to The Solari Wellness Series.

From a high level point of view, I know that this may sound a little basic, but what is the connection between oxygen and health, and why is it important to get enough oxygen into the body?

Dr. Robert Rowen: Oxygen is the foundation of all animal life. I will try to give you an analogy. When you plug your lamp into the wall, there are two connections, correct?

Mouchet: Yes.

Dr. Rowen: One is a positive, and one is a negative. If you only had one line going into the wall, would your light come on?

Mouchet: Probably not.

Dr. Rowen: You are correct. It would not. When you eat, you take in food, you take in calories, and they have an abundance of electrons. But without oxygen, they have no place to go. So getting back to your lamp, you could plug one wire into the wall, and there are electrons that can come into the light bulb, but they have nowhere to go, so the light doesn’t come on. You need oxygen to collect those electrons to make energy and do work. Without oxygen your body comes to a dead stop exactly like that light in the analogy.

Mouchet: So is it like a carrier for nutrients?

Dr. Rowen: No, it’s not a carrier. It is what makes energy in your body.

Here is another example. What would happen if you put a plastic wrapper over the carburetor of your engine?

Mouchet: No oxygen, so it stops working.

Dr. Rowen: Exactly. It’s the same thing here.
Mouchet: So it’s not the fuel, but it enables the fuel to do its job to create energy.

Dr. Rowen: That is correct.

Mouchet: The fuel being the nutrients coming from the food.

Dr. Rowen: Oxygen is the most important substance to the body. You can live three minutes without oxygen. You can live three days without water. You can live 30 days without food. That is the rule of thumb. Three minutes without oxygen. It’s sort of like unplugging your light bulb without oxygen.

Mouchet: Are there any organs that would be most affected by a lack of oxygen – whether it is caused by shallow breathing or the environment?

Dr. Rowen: The organ that is most susceptible to oxygen availability is the brain. You will lose consciousness in seconds if oxygen stops to the brain, and your brain will begin to die in three minutes if there is no oxygen. You will lose consciousness much faster than that.

The heart is somewhat similar, but the brain is the most sensitive. All organs will be damaged by a lack of oxygen.

Shallow breathing is too complicated. You may have shallow but rapid breathing that is bringing enough oxygen in, and you mentioned the environment. The environment affects everything – toxins in the environment, air pollution in the environment, and I am sure that you are concerned about the lowering amount of oxygen in our atmosphere. That is especially true in the cities.

In cities where you have tall buildings and you have internal combustion engines, I have seen reports that oxygen availability can drop by even a third. That will have health impacts in my opinion.

Mouchet: You think that lower oxygen levels in the atmosphere are already causing some problems for some people. Are you personally seeing the effects of this in your practice, or not yet?
Dr. Rowen: I can’t pinpoint that specifically. I don’t work in a big city, and I work very close to the Pacific Ocean, so there is an abundance of decent air coming in. But if I was living in a mega-city – say the east end of Los Angeles on a stagnant day, I can imagine that there would be some problems. People would just not feel very good because they are not going to have much voltage in their body because they don’t have oxygen to make energy or they don’t have enough oxygen.

Mouchet: Besides doing some breathwork to bring more air in, if the air quality is not very good, I suppose that is not a good idea to breathe more deeply. What do you think?

Dr. Rowen: You have to breathe. Whether the air is good or not, you have to breathe. I don’t know the impact of shallow breathing versus deep breathing in the presence of significant air pollution. I haven’t seen anything on point to that. But you do have to breathe. I’ve been in Delhi, India where the air pollution was thick enough that you could literally cut it. It’s horrible. Did I want to take deep breaths? No, I intuitively didn’t want to.

All that means is that instead of poisoning all of my lungs with the deep breath, I was only poisoning the shallow breathing part of my lungs more.

Mouchet: If we want to optimize our oxygenation level, are there solutions that are available today?

Dr. Rowen: You are probably thinking of breathing supplemental oxygen. It’s not a bad idea – especially at night. Many people have sleep apnea and they stop breathing at night and their oxygen levels plummet. That is a prescription, in my opinion, for cancer because cancer thrives or rises in a low-oxygen environment.

I sometimes will tell people to get an oxygen concentrator and hook it up and then breathe it through their nose at night so they are enriching themselves at night, when they are most vulnerable, with some additional oxygen.

There are other methods as well to help this. The one that I do the most is ozone therapy. Ozone therapy really helps the body’s oxygen metabolism. It makes red cells more flexible. It’s red cells that carry oxygen.

The real goal here is to get what oxygen is available to your lungs, and I am in agreement that it is decreasing. We could be destroying the planet, but let’s talk about hard solutions.
The goal is to get what oxygen is available through your lungs, into your bloodstream, and delivered to your tissues. I like ozone therapy because it improves red cell metabolism for delivering oxygen. The red cell ‘cargo’ is oxygen, just like a train has cargo. When it reaches the small capillaries where your tissues are, it has to empty that ‘cargo’ so that the cells in the periphery out in your tissues and organs can grab the oxygen and burn it for energy.

If the oxygen is not released, then the red cells that go through the capillary don’t release it. While you might have oxygen in your body, your tissues are starving for the oxygen. So I like ozone because it improves the capability of the red blood cell to carry oxygen and it improves the red cells’ flexibility. The red cell happens to be of larger diameter than the capillary it’s going through, so it has to fold, flex, and bend to get through, and ozone assists that process.

Ozone increases something called 2.3-DPG in the red cell, and that causes the red cell to dump more oxygen into the tissues. Those are the big three mechanisms by which ozone helps with oxygen metabolism. Ozone does other things, but you are focused on oxygen right now.

**Mouchet:** Right. Who would you recommend oxygenation to – for the purpose that we are discussing right now?

**Dr. Rowen:** What are you referring to?

**Mouchet:** Ozone therapy to increase the oxygenation of the body.

**Dr. Rowen:** I think it could benefit just about anybody. I do it myself simply for prevention – to keep my body as sharp as I can. I recommend it for athletes to have better oxygenation. I recommend it for sick people because you get oxygen in your cells, and it can make energy to heal. So I actually do think that it is a treatment that virtually everybody could benefit by. I’m not trying to sell it to people, but I think that it has value to just about everything under the sun. It does more to treat more conditions than anything I have ever seen in standard medicine combined, and I believe that it is doing that through these oxygen mechanisms and also helping to modulate the immune system.

**Mouchet:** You need to do that through an IV?
Dr. Rowen: Some you can do through IV. That is probably the best, but you can take the gas rectally. You can make ozone water and drink it. You can take it in your ear. Women can take vaginal ozone. You can also get into a body bag or a sauna and let it get absorbed through your skin. So there are lots of ways to do it.

Mouchet: So do you know of any other ways to increase or optimize the oxygenation of the body?

Dr. Rowen: Yes, there is another one. A long time ago a German man, Manfred von Ardenne, who developed a technique called ‘exercise with oxygen therapy’. He called it ‘multi-step oxygen therapy’. Here in the West we call it ‘exercise with oxygen’.

Here you do exercise, and it doesn’t matter what kind of exercise it is; you just do some hard exercise while you are breathing high oxygen – like close to 100%. There are modifications of this. One particular method is promoted by a company called Live02. They have you breathing oxygen that is in a bag, and then you throw a little lever and it takes you up to high altitude – like 8,000-9,000 feet altitude – based on oxygen pressure that you are breathing.

This favorably stresses the body. The body responds and builds itself by stresses. This is a stress to the body by making it temporarily hypoxic when you go to high altitude, and then your blood vessels open up wide because they are wanting more oxygen. Then you throw the lever, and now you are breathing 100% oxygen again. Your body literally gets flooded with oxygen, and that helps turn the aging clock back on your capillaries.

Mouchet: Interesting!

Dr. Rowen: It is well-studied. Your listeners can probably find the book online by Manfred von Ardenne. I got my book off of Amazon. I think he called it *Multi-Step Oxygen Therapy*.

Mouchet: It is a little bit like simulating living at higher altitude, but you breathe in a higher concentration of oxygen so it has an even stronger effect on the body, right?

Dr. Rowen: It takes you artificially to high altitude, which gives you a stress on your body – which is good – and then when you are stressed at high altitude and working out hard and you need more oxygen, you throw a lever and it opens up to 100% oxygen. Now while your body’s blood vessels are wide open looking for oxygen, it gets it, and your body now gets flooded all over with oxygen.
It helps to reverse the aging clock in your capillaries – both lungs and periphery – so that more red cells can get through easier.

**Mouchet:** Have you heard about oxygen as a dietary supplement? I see on Amazon some kind of oxygen in a liquid form.

**Dr. Rowen:** The chemical in that is sodium chlorite. It does have medicinal properties. In terms of oxygen content, no.

**Mouchet:** Is there anything that you want to mention now, or is it not relevant?

**Dr. Rowen:** It might help people who have infection because it has a reactive form of oxygen. But in terms of getting what your goal is here, is it more oxygen into the system for combustion? No. I don’t think that you are getting squat with it.

**Mouchet:** I see. I heard recently about this blood flow restricted form of exercise that comes from Japan, the Kaatsu method, that Dr. Mercola is promoting right now as the latest way to “hack” your body.

The reasoning is that if blood flow restrictive exercise can have positive effects on the body, do you think that oxygen restriction could also have some positive effects? Is that what you were talking about just a minute ago?

**Dr. Rowen:** That is exactly what I was talking about with the exercise with oxygen. Exactly.

**Mouchet:** Stressing the body can be good, but, of course, you don’t want to stress it too much, right?

**Dr. Rowen:** We build our muscles by stressing them and pumping iron. If you don’t pump iron and stress your body, it gets flabby. It’s the same thing here. This type of stress to the body is a good idea.

**Mouchet:** What do you think of the little devices that you can use to measure the oxygenation level of your body – the oxygen saturation? Is that useful to start using to get an idea of how much oxygen gets into our body, or is it not an accurate measurement?

**Dr. Rowen:** That is called a pulse oximeter. All that it is doing is measuring the oxygen saturation at your fingernail.
Mouchet: In the blood, or in the fingernail?

Dr. Rowen: In the blood underneath the fingernail.

Mouchet: So is it representative of how well we are oxygenating all of the cells of the body?

Dr. Rowen: Yes and no. If the pulse oximeter was showing an oxygen saturation of 91, I would say that you have got significant trouble, but most of the time it is going to say 98 or 99, and it is not going to tell you much.

Mouchet: Is there any other recommendation that you would like to share with our audience regarding this topic of oxygen for health and wellness?

Dr. Rowen: Even if oxygen is present and you have oxygen, if you are not eating a good diet, you are not going to burn the oxygen that you want.

My mantra is: If God didn’t make it, don’t eat it. Eat what grows around you ripe, raw, organic, and – if possible – when in season.

Mouchet: Local if possible, right?

Dr. Rowen: Local is best if available.

Mouchet: Okay, great. Thank you very much, Dr. Rowen and Skye for spending some of your precious time with us today. Breathwork is a tool that we can easily use to improve our health and well-being. There are other options as well, as you heard from Dr. Rowen.

If our listeners feel inspired to work with either one of you, they can find you both on my wellness platform at www.Healoha.com. Look in the ‘Private Yoga’ or ‘Nutrition’ category for Skye Birdsall and in the Second Opinion category for Dr. Rowen.

This is Brigitte Mouchet with the Solari Wellness series. Thank you for listening. Take good care of yourself because it is more fun to be well.
MODIFICATION

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