

SINGING TUITION

BREATHING

Firstly we should look at **HOW NOT TO BREATHE** [Click Here](#).

For the purposes of this discussion we will call this breath a shallow or upper chest breath.

Most people erroneously refer to this breath as a deep breath in that it expands the upper part of the chest creating depth from front to back rather than from top to bottom as is required for singing. In other words a deep breath is a breath that sends the air from the top of the lungs to the bottom of the lungs causing the stomach area to expand.

Why shouldn't we breathe this way?

1. It seems to send vast amounts of oxygen into the blood and brain very quickly causing hyperventilation (dizziness).
2. It creates tension. Test it for yourself. Sit in a chair and take a large number of upper chest breaths as shown in the video clip and observe the hyperventilation and tension it creates.
3. It initially causes the throat to close. It seems that when the brain detects a large amount of air in the upper chest it wants to regulate the outward flow by closing the throat. Test it for yourself. Sit in a chair and take a large upper chest breath and then try to speak. Observe how strained and thin your voice sounds.
4. Eventually the air contained in the upper part of the chest flows out uncontrollably and too quickly resulting in a situation where vocalists are constantly running out of air.

The correct **DEEP BREATH** ([Click Here](#)) where we send the air to the bottom of the lungs results in the opposite of these very negative effects in that it is relaxing and centering. Using the abdomen muscles and the diaphragm easily controls the airflow. The throat is relaxed and open and we will never hyperventilate or run out of air.

Remember these very important points :

1. The body is programmed to breath this way.
2. We all breathe this way when we are asleep and when we are not conscious of our breathing.
3. We breathe incorrectly when we become conscious of our breathing. I believe that this incorrect breathing occurs firstly because the upper chest breath has a better look in this very fashion and appearance conscious world and secondly because we incorrectly feel that our lungs start and finish in the upper chest area.

When we breathe correctly as shown in the video clip and send the air down to the bottom of the lungs there is an expansion in the stomach area as it moves out of the way to make room for the air.

KEY WORDS: Sniff and Bagpipes.

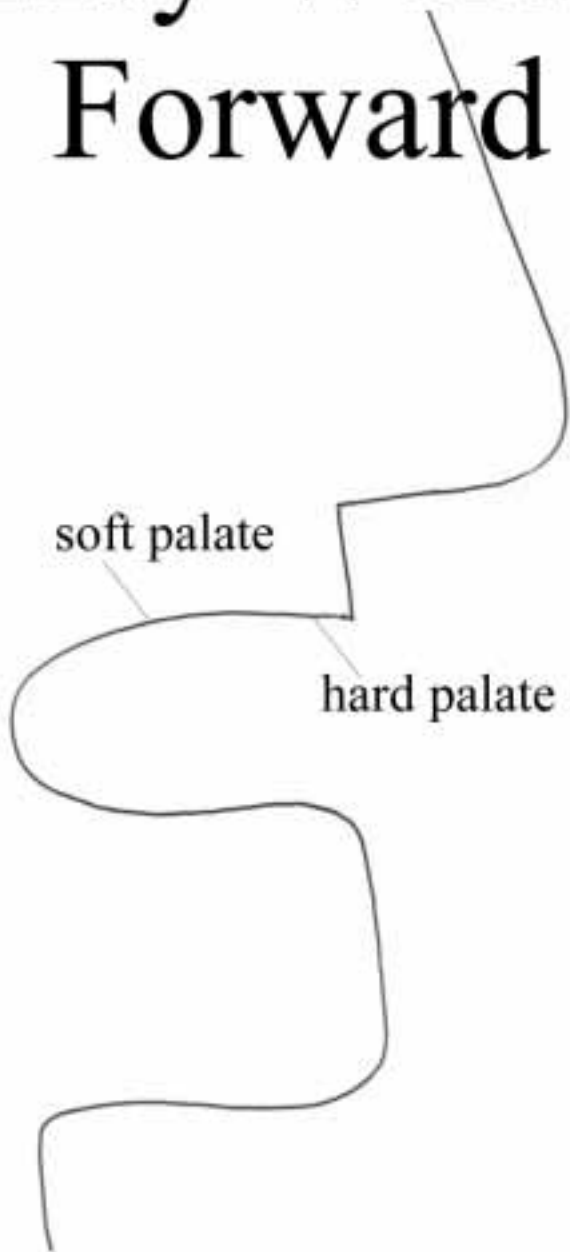
Your breath should be a powerful sniff, which quickly sends the air down to the bottom of the lungs. This sniffing action seems to connect with the abdominal muscles and diaphragm and creates a situation where the air is dragged downward as the abdominal area expands to create the necessary space. The outward breath should be controlled and supported by slowly pulling in the abdominal muscles.

Blowing into and filling a bag with air while the players arm applies steady pressure to that bag sending the air into the chanter to produce the sound is how **Bagpipes** are played. It is very similar to what we need to do. We have to fill up our bag, which is the bottom of the lungs, and apply steady pressure to send the air into our chanter by using the abdominal muscles and the diaphragm.

Sniffing exercise: Short sharp sniffs connecting with the abdomen muscles as shown in this video clip. **Click Here.**

Breathing exercise: Take deep breaths sniffing the air down to the bottom of the lungs and pull in the abdominal muscles to support the breath on the way out as shown in this video clip. **Click Here.** In time you will reprogram how you breathe.

Key Word: Forward



PLACEMENT

KEY WORD: FORWARD

Is this you?

My voice is too breathy.

My voice is too weak.

I run out of air.

I usually have a sore throat after only singing a few songs.

I sound slightly out of tune.

All of these problems can be solved by correctly **placing** the vibrating air space in the mouth so that it resonates against the **hard palate**. We will refer to this as keeping the voice **FORWARD**.

When this vibrating air space resonates against the hard surface of the **hard palate** it is reflected and amplified. It is loud without the need to place excessive pressure on the vocal cords. It requires less air and is rich with harmonics and consequently is more in tune.

When the vibrating air space in the mouth strikes the **soft palate** the sound is absorbed into the soft tissue and sounds weak and breathy. The same thing would occur if we filled the body of an acoustic guitar with cotton wool. No matter how hard we were to strike those guitar strings, no real tone or volume could be produced. Eventually the guitar strings would break. This unfortunately is what can happen to the singer's strings i.e. the vocal cords.

When the sound strikes the soft palate and a definite loss of tone and volume occurs most beginners will usually attempt to correct this by throwing too much air into the attack and or by making the vocal cords work a little harder. Too much air tends to dry out the vocal cords and making them work harder under these conditions can result in soreness, loss of voice or even permanent damage.

The answer is to breathe correctly and to place the voice **FORWARD**.

EXERCISES

1. Relax your jaw and allow it to simply hang.
2. Relax your tongue and allow it to lie flat with the tip touching the rear of your lower front teeth.
3. Raise your soft palate and open your throat slightly. This is a similar sensation to the beginning of a **YAWN**. Try yawning and identify what happens as the yawn begins.
4. Avoid a full smiley face, as this tends to drag the sound back to the soft palate.
5. Relax your face and push your lips forward slightly as this helps to bring the sound forward onto the hard palate.
6. Open your mouth more on higher notes and allow it to close a little on lower notes.
7. Use less air on higher notes and more on lower notes.

SCALES

Sing through the following scale exercises and remember these important points:

Take the correct breath.

Relax your jaw and tongue.

Push your lips forward slightly and visualise the sound as being FORWARD and right on your lips.

Open your throat slightly and raise the soft palate.

As the notes get higher open your mouth more and pull in harder on the abdomen muscles.

Start on step one of the major scale and proceed as follows 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Men start with the key of C (as shown in the example below) and proceed in semitones to the key of G. Follow the link to the male piano accompaniment below.

Women begin a fifth above in the key of G and proceed in semitones to the key of D.

Follow the link to the female piano accompaniment below.

Initially use an **EEE** vowel sound (as shown in the example below) and eventually progress to using an **AAH** vowel sound.

Keep the sound **FORWARD**. If it is too far back and on the soft palate it will sound breathy, weak and out of tune.

A Breathly male voice incorrectly placed against the soft palate using an EEE vowel sound. **CLICK HERE**

The same voice however this time the student is able to bring his voice forward as the scale progresses. **CLICK HERE**

Better placement this time. key of C **CLICK HERE** and key of G **CLICK HERE**

Male Piano Accompaniment **CLICK HERE**

Female Piano Accompaniment **CLICK HERE**

Hopefully the information contained in this document will help you find your natural singing voice. If you find that you are able to apply the information contained herein and your voice is improving then I would suggest that you go to the next step and find a good singing teacher.