



## Rob Strang's book review of Breath – The New Science of a Lost Art, author James Nestor.

The blurb inside the dust jacket of James Nestor's book boldly states that "You will never breathe the same again". I haven't. Breath takes us through the history, science, and techniques of breathing as though we were reading the owner's manual for our body. Not far in, I was breathing a little differently.

He takes us on his own journey to improve his health through better breathing. Over many years he travels the world and the ages to learn the art of breathing in different cultures and times. He interviews practitioners of various breathing techniques who cure a host of ailments, either caused or influenced by poor breathing.

As a journalist and science writer, James Nestor is careful not to present proper breathing as a cure all. He calls it the "missing pillar of health", key to preventative maintenance of the body. That said, the adverse health effects he attributes to poor breathing are too many to list. I was somewhat incredulous at first, but the science and references are convincing. A sampling includes ADHD, anxiety, anorexia, periodontal disease, sexual dysfunction, sleep apnea, snoring, autoimmune and nervous system disorders. There is also a fascinating technique for minimizing the effects of emphysema that has apparently been lost.

Much of our breathing-related illness is attributed to a diet that has changed to softer more processed food since our early days in the wilderness. The structure of our face and jaw have dyevolved, restricted our breathing passages, leading to a host of problems. Despairing that we cannot turn back the evolutionary clock, I was relieved to read that the bones in the face can still grow later in life, and the book provided means to improve our lot. It is very much an instructional book on how to improve our breathing and health. It is well organized, with each chapter outlining a different aspect of healthy breathing.

The simplest techniques are in the first half of the book. They are quite basic, but each one comes with the science to help the reader to commit to their use. Spoiler alert! Breathe through your nose! The mouth is only a back up. The greatest indicator of lifespan is lung capacity and there are ways to improve yours. Chew your food too. Your mother was right!

The latter half of the book includes more "potent techniques" that often tap into our autonomic nervous system. These require a greater commitment to master, but aspects can be tried without much effort. The incentive is that they potentially yield life-changing results. Again, the rationale, examples and references are compelling.

The epilogue provides a nice summary of the key takeaways, followed by an appendix with the different breathing techniques in bullet points. I have referred to this many times. One could get lost in the 38 pages of intriguing references that include many web links.

The book was informative, thought provoking and undoubtedly instructive to aiding good health. Like many operating manuals, I regret not having read it before using the equipment.