



REJUVENATE WITH SPRING

Two Ways to Jump Start Your Health.

by Laurie Young

Each Spring, as we become more active after a long winter, our attention naturally turns to the softness of our bodies. How do we get ready for the activities of summer after a slow winter of hibernating and eating heavy, comforting foods?

Every year, my grandmother set a date for “Spring Cleaning.” She opened windows to invite fresh, cool air into her home and spent the day in a flutter of activity, taking down curtains, washing windows, and tending to corners of the house that had not received attention in months. By the end of the day, a beautiful new plant or a tray of seedlings rested by the kitchen windowsill, and the house was filled with the promise of Spring.

Much like a home, our bodies deserve renewed attention at this time of year. We can make use of our naturally increasing energy and optimism to strengthen personal goals for better eating, freer movement, and letting go of excess insulation that may have gathered in our bodies to keep us warm during the winter months.

I ask clients who come to me for nutritional health counseling to begin by “adding in” healthful foods and practices. This is a different approach than the restrictive narrowing down of options in many diet and exercise routines. By focusing on “adding in,” you are free to be curious and creative about finding new foods to love, and you will easily crowd out less desirable choices. It works with exercise too. As you add in enjoyable movement activities, you get to explore health as play rather than work.

Following are two practices to add into your health routine that will rejuvenate you in the spirit of Spring:

Lighten your meals by increasing leafy greens.

By nature, we associate green leaves with spring. The first buds poke out of stark tree branches and soon a gentle

watercolor palette of new green appears. Bulbs emerge and seedlings have started indoors. Notice the green all around you and think of this as nature’s invitation to eat more greens. The fiber will cleanse your body from the accumulations of winter. The nutrients will oxygenate

Orange & Greens Smoothie

Be mindful that freshness of vegetables and ripeness of fruit will affect sweetness of the smoothie.

Ingredients:

- ½ cup water
- 1 very ripe D’Anjou pear OR 1 cup frozen pineapple chunks
- 1 orange, peeled (sweetness matters!)
- ½ to 1 cup spinach, washed
- 1 cup ice cubes

Directions:

1. Wash the fruit and vegetables.
2. Place all ingredients into your blender in the order listed and secure lid.
3. Slowly increase speed of blender, until it is at full speed.
4. Check to see if you need to stop the blender at any time to help contents further down into it.
5. Blend for 45 seconds or until desired consistency is reached.
6. If you’d prefer a lighter taste, you can always add more ice and blend again!

your blood and provide nourishment to your cells, and your body will respond in kind with a feeling of lightness.

When my clients add in green smoothies (see sidebar) and increase salads, very soon they appear in my office smiling with more youthful energy. Try eating more greens daily, and you will also notice the direct connection between these foods and improved energy. As you become excited by the benefits, you will naturally want to continue and will start to crave them. By harmonizing with the season, you are doing a little spring cleaning within your own body and effortlessly taking an important step towards the goal of eating more fruits and vegetables—a constant refrain in every health-oriented recommendation.

Breathe—deeply, naturally and mindfully.

We literally receive breaths of fresh air in the Spring, and we should drink it in deeply, much as my grandmother would do by opening windows to allow new air into the home. Learning to appreciate the simple act of breathing serves as a foundation for improved digestion, calming of the nervous system, and enjoyment of all that surrounds us in the present moment. What better time to begin practicing this art than in the gentle newness of Spring?

My clients are often surprised when I incorporate such a practice into my nutritional health counseling. They've come to me for coaching on food, and yet find themselves also being encouraged to remember the naturalness with which they easily breathed as a child. What do the two have to do with one another? Everything.

The digestive process, which is the breaking down and conversion of food into energy, begins when we see

appealing food and salivate in response to it. Taking just a few deep, slow breaths at the beginning of a meal sets a tone and pace for how quickly and thoroughly your food becomes nourishment. It re-sets your nervous system and affects how well you chew. It determines whether you give your body time to initiate the sequence of digestive processes that result in energy, and how quickly your body sends back cues that it is satiated so that you stop eating.

Mindful breathing applied at the table supports mindful eating and conscious food choices. You will taste your food better and enjoy it more as you become alert to which choices increase energy rather than weigh you down. Together, these practices result in improved digestion, better nutrient absorption, increased calorie burn, and reduced calorie consumption.

Food is more than just fuel. It is nourishment. Similarly, breathing is more than just taking in oxygen to satisfy the requirement of being alive. It is, quite literally, inspiration. So, slow down, breathe deeply, be inspired by the feeling of Spring and commit to a steady practice of adding in healthy choices one step at a time as the weeks and months unfold. Begin with leafy greens and mindful breathing before and during meals. And make time to notice the rejuvenating effect of adding in these two simple practices.

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Get control of your 'inspiration' by practicing mindful breathing, at least once a day.

This breathing pattern will initiate the relaxation response in your body, eliminating stress and tension. The "Full Complete Breath" is nature's way of cueing the body to let go and savor life's simple pleasures, such as eating.

1) Explore your Natural Breath

Sit in a comfortable position, either cross-legged on the floor or forward on the edge of your chair making sure your feet are flat on the floor. Place your right hand over your heart and your left hand over your abdomen. Straighten the spine, sit up tall, then close your eyes and take note of your natural breathing pattern. Notice whether your natural inhalation begins in the abdomen or in the chest.

Exhale fully, then begin drawing a slow evenly paced breath into the opposite location of your natural inhalation. If you noted that your breath naturally begins in the abdomen, draw into the upper chest first. If you naturally begin in the upper chest, begin in the abdomen first. Exhale fully. You are ready to begin.

2) Three-Part-Breath (with mouth closed)

Draw the first third of your inhale into your abdomen or upper chest (opposite your natural pattern), pause for a beat. Draw the next third of your inhale into the middle of the chest, pause for a beat. Then, draw in the last third to complete the breath, filling the entire chest cavity with air. Pause for a beat.

Exhale the entire breath out at once with the same slow, even pace you used on the inhale. Continue this practice for 10-15 breaths keeping your hands on the chest and abdomen for guidance. Pacing of the inhalation and exhalation should not leave you gasping for air or feeling overly full of breath.

3) Link the three parts of the breath together to achieve "Full Complete Breath"

Take in a Full Complete Breath using a slow, even pace eliminating the pauses so that each segment of the breath seamlessly flows into the next.

Be mindful of where you begin and end the breath. It is important to place the beginning of the breath in the opposite location of the natural breathing pattern you noticed in Step 1. A Full Complete Breath should consist of an evenly controlled inhalation. The abdomen extends and the chest rises. On the exhalation, the belly draws back in and the chest collapses.

Practice Full Complete Breath at least once a day, and you will soon discover the key to mindful breathing.

Courtesy of: Matthew Corrigan, CMT, RYT - Certified Massage Therapist & Register Yoga Teacher www.pranahhealthworks.com