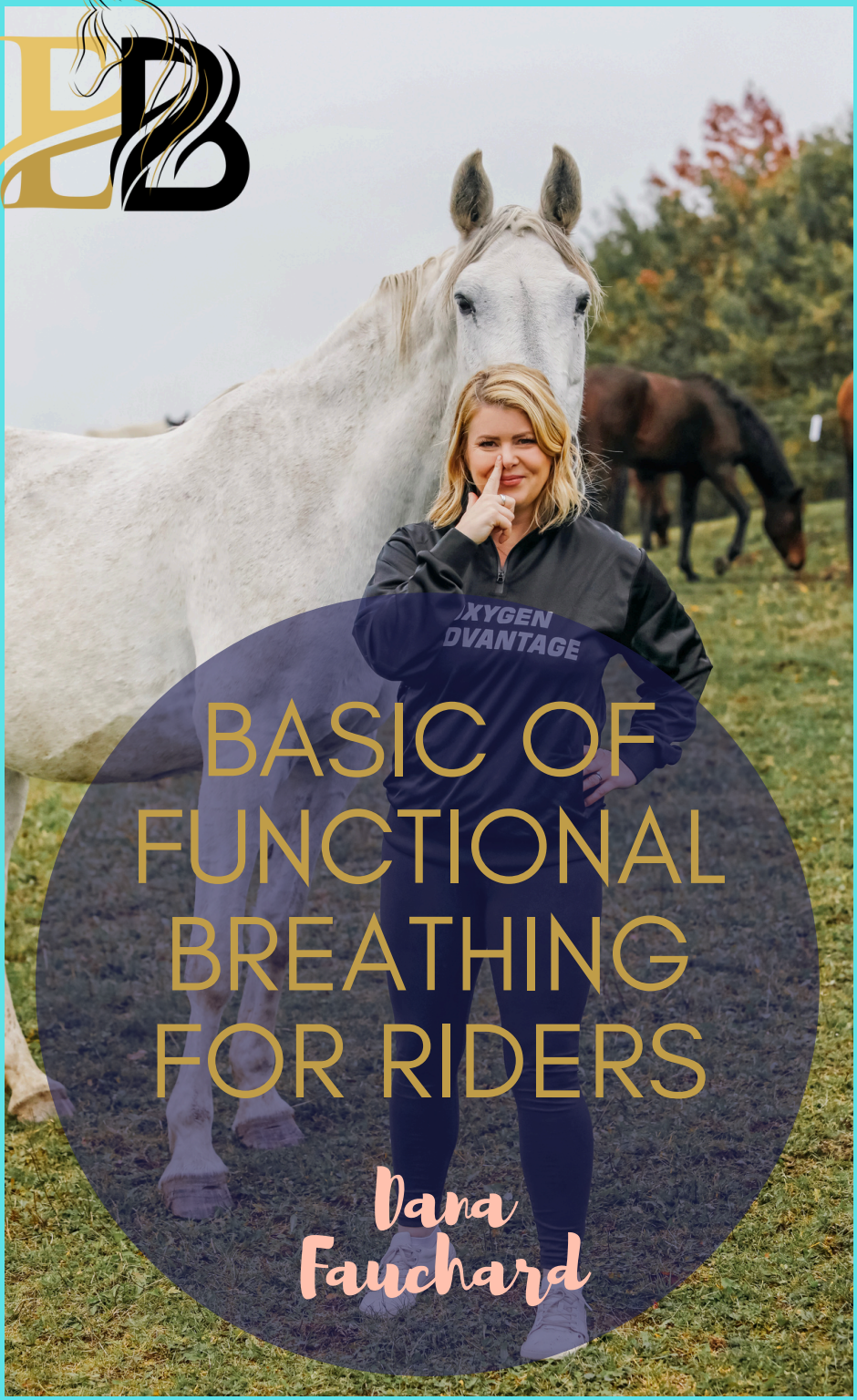


BASIC OF FUNCTIONAL BREATHING FOR RIDERS

Dana Fauchard

CONTENT

CHAPTER

01

About me

ABOUT ME

My name is Dana Fauchard, and I am a movement specialist, therapeutic massage therapist, and instructor of the Spiral Stabilization method and the Oxygen Advantage Advanced Instructor.
This combination allows me to offer riders a unique approach that connects physical stability, effective breathing, and mental balance.

I discovered functional breathing as a key to better performance, stability in the saddle, and overall harmony between rider and horse.

Through personal experience, I've come to understand how important breathing is not only for our bodies but also for our minds.

I apply this method primarily to riders, as they face specific challenges—from competition stress to intense physical demands.

My passion is to show riders that improving their breathing can lead to a more stable seat, better connection with their horse, and greater confidence in the saddle. This is not just theory—every inhale and exhale is a practical step toward improvement.

"BREATHING IS THE FIRST THING WE DO WHEN WE ENTER THIS WORLD—AND THE LAST WHEN WE LEAVE IT. YET MOST RIDERS NEVER STOP TO CONSIDER HOW THEY BREATHE. THROUGH THE EQUESBREATHING APPROACH, YOU CAN LEARN TO USE YOUR BREATH AS A POWERFUL TOOL FOR STABILITY, PERFORMANCE, AND INNER CALM—BOTH IN THE SADDLE AND IN EVERYDAY LIFE."

CHAPTER

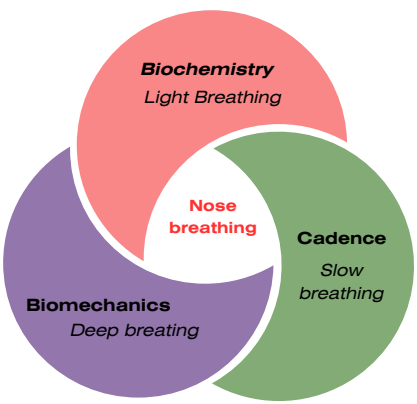
02

What is functional breathing

What is functional breathing

"Functional breathing means efficient breathing—breathing that supports both your body and mind. For riders, proper breathing is essential, as it influences not only your stability in the saddle but also your communication with the horse."

"Functional breathing is a natural way of breathing that optimally supports both physical and mental health. It is breathing that is efficient, calm, and adapted to the body's current needs. For horse riders, it is essential, as it influences stability, balance, and overall harmony between rider and horse. Proper breathing also helps manage stress, improves concentration, and supports recovery after physical exertion."



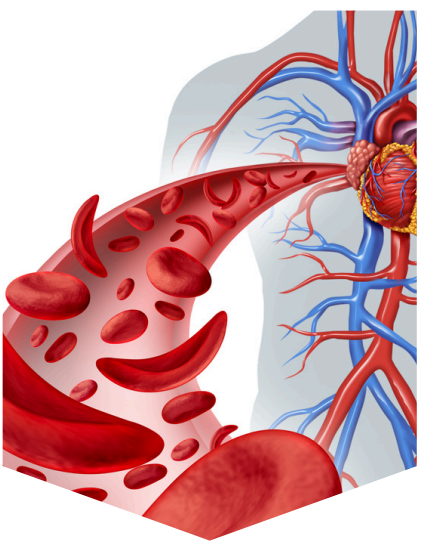
"Functional breathing is based on three core pillars: Biochemistry, Biomechanics, and Psychophysiology, which complement and support each other."

Biochemistry

The biochemical pillar of functional breathing focuses on the balance between oxygen (O_2) and carbon dioxide (CO_2) in the body. While CO_2 is often misunderstood, it plays a vital role in helping oxygen reach your muscles and brain—especially important for riders who need clarity, calm, and endurance. This process, known as the Bohr effect, is key to maintaining energy and focus both in and out of the saddle.

Why it matters:

When CO_2 tolerance is low—such as during rapid or shallow breathing—oxygen cannot be delivered efficiently to the muscles and brain. This results in quicker fatigue, reduced performance, and increased stress.



How it supports riders:

A rider with functional breathing becomes less breathless, can coordinate movements more effectively, and stays calm even in demanding situations such as competitions or intense training sessions.

Biomechanics

What it is:

The biomechanical pillar focuses on the deep connection between breathing and posture. Our breathing muscles—especially the diaphragm—play a vital role not only in respiration but also in stabilizing the core, which is essential for balance and control in the saddle.

Why it matters:

Dysfunctional breathing can lead to weakened deep stabilizing muscles, which negatively affects posture and balance in the saddle.

How it supports riders:

A rider who activates the diaphragm and engages the core correctly gains a more stable seat, communicates more effectively with the horse, and absorbs the horse's movement with greater ease—leading to improved overall performance.

Psychophysiology

What it is:
This pillar explores the connection between breathing, the nervous system, emotions, and mental state.

Why it matters:
Proper breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system (rest-and-recovery mode), helping to reduce stress, anxiety, and tension. In contrast, dysfunctional breathing often overstimulates the sympathetic system (fight-or-flight mode), keeping the body in a state of alert.

How it supports riders:
A rider who learns to regulate their breath can better manage stress during competitions, stay focused under pressure, and remain mentally resilient in unexpected situations.

These three pillars together create a strong foundation for improving both riding performance and overall health. Functional breathing isn’t just about how you breathe during competition—it’s about how you breathe in everyday life. Every breath can be a step toward greater stability, calm, and better results in the saddle.

CHAPTER

03

Breathing Biomechanics and Riding Performance

How Breathing Affects Posture

The Connection Between Breath and Posture:

Breathing is closely linked to posture because the diaphragm is a key stabilizing muscle. When it functions efficiently, it supports spinal stability, pelvic balance, and overall postural control.

Breathing Dysfunction:

Chest breathing or shallow inhalation can overwork the neck and back muscles, limiting your ability to maintain correct riding position.

Stability and Balance in the Saddle

Nasal Breathing:
Activates the diaphragm and engages deep core stabilizing muscles, providing greater stability in the saddle.

Muscular Coordination:
Steady, controlled breathing supports harmonious muscle cooperation, helping you maintain balance even in demanding riding situations.

Communication with the Horse:
Calm, rhythmic breathing creates the conditions for more effective communication between rider and horse, improves movement coordination, and reduces tension.

The Impact of Nasal Breathing on the Diaphragm and Core Muscles

Nasal Breathing:
Encourages proper diaphragm activation, allowing it to work more efficiently and support better core stability.

Diaphragm Function:
Beyond breathing, the diaphragm is a key postural muscle. When activated correctly, it enhances abdominal muscle performance and helps stabilize the rider's core.

Breath and Strength:
Controlled breathing increases core strength and endurance—essential for managing the horse's movement with confidence and ease.

Practical Exercise

Goal: To practice proper diaphragm activation and connect breathing with movement.

Position: Sit upright on a chair or directly in the saddle. Make sure your back is straight and your shoulders are relaxed.

Place your hands on the sides of your ribs with your fingers pointing forward.
Inhale: Breathe in through your nose and feel your ribs expanding sideways. Notice the expansion reaching toward the back of your torso as well.
Exhale: Slowly breathe out through your nose, gently activating your abdominal muscles by drawing your belly button inward toward your spine.
Repetitions: Perform 10 repetitions, focusing on the smoothness and rhythm of your breath.

Observation: Notice how your breath influences your stability and sense of balance.

CHAPTER

04

How Breath Affects Stress and Performance

The Impact of Stress on Riding Performance

Stressful Situations in Riding:
Equestrian sport involves high-pressure moments, whether during competitions, training, or handling unexpected horse reactions. Stress can affect concentration, coordination, and the ability to respond quickly.

Physiological Stress Response:
Under stress, the sympathetic nervous system (the “fight or flight” response) is activated, causing faster breathing, increased heart rate, and reduced fine motor control—crucial for subtle communication with the horse.

Managing Pre-Competition Nerves

Nasal Breathing and the Vagus Nerve:
Slow nasal breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, reducing stress levels and calming both body and mind.

Calming Technique:
Controlled breathing helps lower cortisol (the stress hormone), stabilizes heart rate, and allows riders to feel more confident.

Practical Application:
A calm breath can ease nervousness before entering the arena or preparing for a challenging riding phase.

Practical Exercise: Box breathing

Goal: To reduce tension in the body and improve focus.

- Sit comfortably and relax, or practice directly in the saddle.
- Inhale through your nose for four seconds.
- Hold your breath for four seconds.
- Exhale slowly through your nose for four seconds.
- Hold your breath again for four seconds and repeat until you feel calm.

This technique is a simple yet effective tool that riders can use before a competition, during training, or anytime they feel tension.

CHAPTER

05

Breathing Specifics for Women

How the Hormonal Cycle Affects Breath

Hormonal Fluctuations:
During the menstrual cycle, estrogen and progesterone levels change, influencing breathing. For example, progesterone increases the respiratory center's sensitivity to carbon dioxide by up to 25%, which can lead to faster breathing (hyperventilation).

Respiratory Changes:
In the luteal phase (after ovulation), shallow breathing is common, while in the follicular phase (after menstruation), breathing tends to be smoother and more efficient.

Impact on Performance:
These changes can affect concentration, balance, and strength in the saddle.

“Riding is a beautiful sport, but the female body has its unique characteristics that influence not only physical performance but also breathing. Learn to work with your breath in harmony with your cycle to optimize your training and competitions. Properly guided breathing can be the key to greater confidence in the saddle, better communication with your horse, and overall harmony between you and your four-legged partner.”

Increasing Lung Capacity and Its Importance for Women in Managing Hormonal Fluctuations

Breathing affects not only the oxygenation of the body but also the hormonal system. Improving lung capacity can help women better manage hormonal fluctuations during different phases of the menstrual cycle by:

Stabilizing Carbon Dioxide (CO_2) Levels:
CO_2 is a key regulator of the body's pH and supports efficient oxygen release to tissues (Bohr effect). During hormonal changes, such as increased progesterone, hyperventilation can occur—proper breathing techniques help balance this.

Supporting the Nervous System:
Longer exhales and controlled breathing pace activate the parasympathetic nervous system, reducing stress and promoting recovery.

Women who practice Oxygen Advantage can expect:

Improved Cyclical Energy and Mood: Breathing exercises help stabilize hormonal changes.

Reduced PMS Symptoms: Proper breathing releases tension in the pelvic floor and reduces cramps.

Enhanced Performance: Better oxygen utilization and improved tolerance to physical stress support both athletic performance and recovery.

Increasing lung capacity using Oxygen Advantage techniques is an effective tool for women to not only improve their performance but also better manage hormonal fluctuations.

Through conscious breathing, it is possible to achieve harmony between body and mind, which has a direct impact on quality of life and athletic success.

CHAPTER

06

Exercises for daily practice

Proper and functional breathing is not only a tool to improve riding performance but also a vital part of overall health and well-being. Daily breathing exercises can help enhance oxygenation, reduce stress, and support stability in the saddle. Here are three practical exercises you can incorporate into your daily routine.

Diaphragmatic Breathing for Stability and Balance

Purpose: Improve diaphragmatic movement, activate deep abdominal muscles, and support proper posture.

Starting Position: Imagine a piece of string gently pulling you upward toward the ceiling. Imagine and feel the space between your ribs widening

Instruction:

1. Place your hands on either side of your body at your lower two ribs. I would like you to bring the air deep into your lungs. As you breathe in, feel your ribs expanding outward. As you breathe out, feel your ribs moving inward.
2. Ideally, during an inhalation, as the diaphragm moves downward and the intercostal muscles move outward, this generates outward movement to the front (abdominal), sides and back.

Duration: Practice this exercise for 4 minutes, ideally as a warm-up at the start of your training.

Reduced Light Breathing

Purpose: With light, gentle breathing, blood vessels open and more oxygen is released from red blood cells into tissues and organs.

1. Sit on a chair, take the lotus position, or lie on your back in a semi-supine position. If sitting, imagine a piece of string gently pulling you upward toward the ceiling.
2. Observe your breath as it enters and leaves your nose. Focus on the airflow as it moves in and out of your nose. Feel the slightly colder air entering your nose and feel the slightly warmer air leaving your nose.
3. When you are able to follow your breathing, take a slow breath in through the nose and allow a slow, gentle, relaxed breath out. Slow down the speed of the air as it enters and leaves your nose. Breathe in a slow and gentle manner. Breathing should be so light, quiet and still.
4. Slow down your breathing so that you feel hardly any air entering and leaving your nostrils. Your breathing should be so quiet that the fine hairs within your nostrils do not move.

Duration: Practice this exercise for 4 minutes daily or add it as a warm-up breathing exercise in the saddle before starting your training.

Breath slow – Cadance

Purpose: Increase lung capacity, improve oxygenation, and enhance physical and mental resilience.

1. Place your hands on your lower ribs. As you inhale, feel your ribs expand, and as you exhale, feel them return back.
2. To control the pace, count 4 seconds during the inhale and 6 seconds during the exhale.

Duration: Practice this exercise for 4 minutes daily or add it as a warm-up breathing exercise in the saddle before starting your training.

Functional breathing is like a key you always carry with you. Unlock your full riding potential with it and improve not only your performance but also your connection with your horse.

Thank you for choosing to invest your time and energy into improving your health through functional breathing. This ebook has given you an initial insight into the vital role breathing can play in your riding performance, emotional balance, and overall well-being.

Breathing is not just an automatic bodily function – it's a powerful tool you can access anytime to strengthen your body, calm your mind, and create a deeper bond with your horse. Every inhale and exhale is a step toward greater harmony, balance, and joy in life.

I look forward to guiding you further on this journey and being part of your transformation.

With respect and support,
Dana Fauchard
Functional Breathing Instructor and Breathing expert for riders

For more information, visit **equesbreathing.com** or follow me on social media **@equesbreathing**