



Breathing Exercises: Sarnoff Squeeze

The instructions below are for an exaggerated form of this exercise. Once you are comfortable with the location of the rectus abdominis, you will be able to practice the Sarnoff Squeeze anywhere without drawing attention to yourself. Do it in this exaggerated manner and then practice doing it more quietly until it is simply a silent exhalation just like all the others you expel during your day.

Exercise:

- Stand or sit up straight
- Lean slightly forward
- Take a big inhalation
- Contract the specific rectus abdominis muscles (see explanation below); pressing palms together in front of your chest helps isolate that area
- Say “ssss” like a hiss through slightly parted lips (make sure not to clench your teeth)
- Relax the rectus abdominis muscles at the end of your exhalation, then inhale again deeply
- Repeat several times

Explanation:

The rectus abdominis is made up of the eight muscles commonly referred to as your “eight-pack” or “abs.” For the purpose of this exercise, focus on tightening the top two of these muscles that stretch over your ribs, just below the sternum. This area is also referred to as the vital triangle, which includes the diaphragm and these two muscles, in many meditations and other breathing exercises.

The hissing portion of the exercise is essential in engaging the diaphragm and results in a purposeful and controlled exhalation. When nervous, you may find yourself taking deep breathes in hopes of slowing a racing heart and clearing your mind. However, it’s the exhalation that truly produces the calming effect that you desire. A quick exhalation is actually counterproductive to your deep breathing and causes the lightheaded feeling associated with hyperventilation. Making the Hissing sound while contracting the rectus abdominis will give you far better results than deep breathing alone.

Benefits:

Contracting the rectus abdominis can produce miraculous results. Flexing or engaging these muscles:

- **Prevents the production of the fear-producing chemicals noradrenalin and epinephrine**
- Generates positive energy (happiness and excitement)
- Increases voice projection
- Reduces negative emotions (anger, depression, stress and fatigue)
- Decreases vocal shakiness and quivering
- Suppresses queasiness and nausea

Special Tip:

Practice the exercise without pressing your hands together. By simply tightening the rectus abdominis muscles and exhaling quietly, you can use this any time that you plan to speak to others. Challenge yourself to make the hissing sound as quietly as possible. Whether you're preparing to give a keynote speech or closing an important deal over dinner, the Sarnoff Squeeze will help you deliver your ideal presentation.

Background:

Dorothy Sarnoff is most well-known for her role in Broadway's *The King and I* where she performed alongside Yul Brynner. Having suffered for years with severe stage fright, she discovered how to conquer her fear while waiting to go on stage one night. She saw Brynner "in the wings pushing a wall in a lunging position as though he'd like to knock it down, grunting as he did it." He explained to her that he was controlling his nerves and she decided to see if it would work. And sure enough, it worked—minus the grunting! Instead of grunting, Sarnoff chose to hiss as she exhaled which yielded the same effect—a complete exhalation.

As a public speaker, Sarnoff realized that pushing on a wall in front of a crowded room wasn't practical. She analyzed the exercise that Brynner taught her and realized that it was the contracting of the rectus abdominis muscles that made it effective. By just tightening the muscles in her upper abdomen, Sarnoff could now use the exercise anywhere at any time to combat her feelings of nervousness.