

Breathing Control

Breathing is an integral part of your life. If you are unable to breathe for a short period of time, then you'll lose consciousness. Any time longer and you can run into some very serious problems (i.e. brain damage or death.) As such, your body is tuned to monitor your breathing and maintain the breathing cycle. Here are some thoughts on breathing while you shoot pistol:

- Breathing causes movement. As such, your minimum arc of movement will be exaggerated while you're breathing. Consequently, you cannot shoot and breathe simultaneously.
- Your eyes need oxygen to see the target properly. Your body will fight for air as it uses up its supply. The symptoms of oxygen deprivation adversely affect your control over your hold and your sight alignment and picture. You need to have oxygen in your system to shoot well.
- Since the two statements are at odds with each other, you need to reach a compromise between shooting and breathing. You need to make sure that you have lots of oxygen in your system; such that, you can pause breathing long enough to get your shot to break within your minimum arc of movement. Here's one method for slow-fire shooting:
 1. Once you are in position and ready to fire, take two or three slow, deep breaths. (This makes sure that your system is fully oxygenated.) Make sure that you do not hyperventilate by breathing fast and deep.
 2. As you raise the pistol, breathe slowly in (inhale).
 3. As you settle on the target, exhale completely, but don't force the last bit of air out of your lungs. Just breathe out naturally. At this point, you're at a natural point between breathing in and out. Your body is accustomed to a pause at this stage.
 4. During this pause (lasting 6 - 10 seconds) don't breathe. Finish obtaining the perfect sight picture and squeeze the trigger.
 5. Complete your follow through after the shot, and then inhale as you lower your pistol.
 6. After the shot, ensure normal breathing takes place.
 7. Note: As an alternative to exhaling as you settle into your shooting position, you could exhale half a breath. This keeps some oxygen in your lungs. At this half breath point, you pause and fire. After following through, exhale completely as you lower your gun. This forces an unnatural pause in your breathing cycle, but some people feel more comfortable with this method.
- Rapid Fire events would use the above sequence, as five shots are being delivered in under 10 seconds.
- In Timed Phases (five shots in 20 seconds), I would recommend a short, shallow breath between the second and third shot, or between the third and fourth shot. Holding your breath for a full 20 seconds is not how people breathe and I suspect that your body will start signalling you to breathe. This will undoubtedly affect your shooting.
- Take time to ensure that you have deep breaths during the match. Over the course of a 60 shot air or free pistol match, you will have held your breath a lot. This will affect your system as the match progresses. Good aerobic capacity will reduce the impact and making sure to breathe will help too.
- Taking three deep breaths prior to shooting can also work effectively as a "calming" or relaxing technique. Incorporate this into your mental training.

Breathing is important to shooting. It must not interfere with your minimum arc of movement. Develop a routine, follow the pattern faithfully and this will become natural when you shoot.