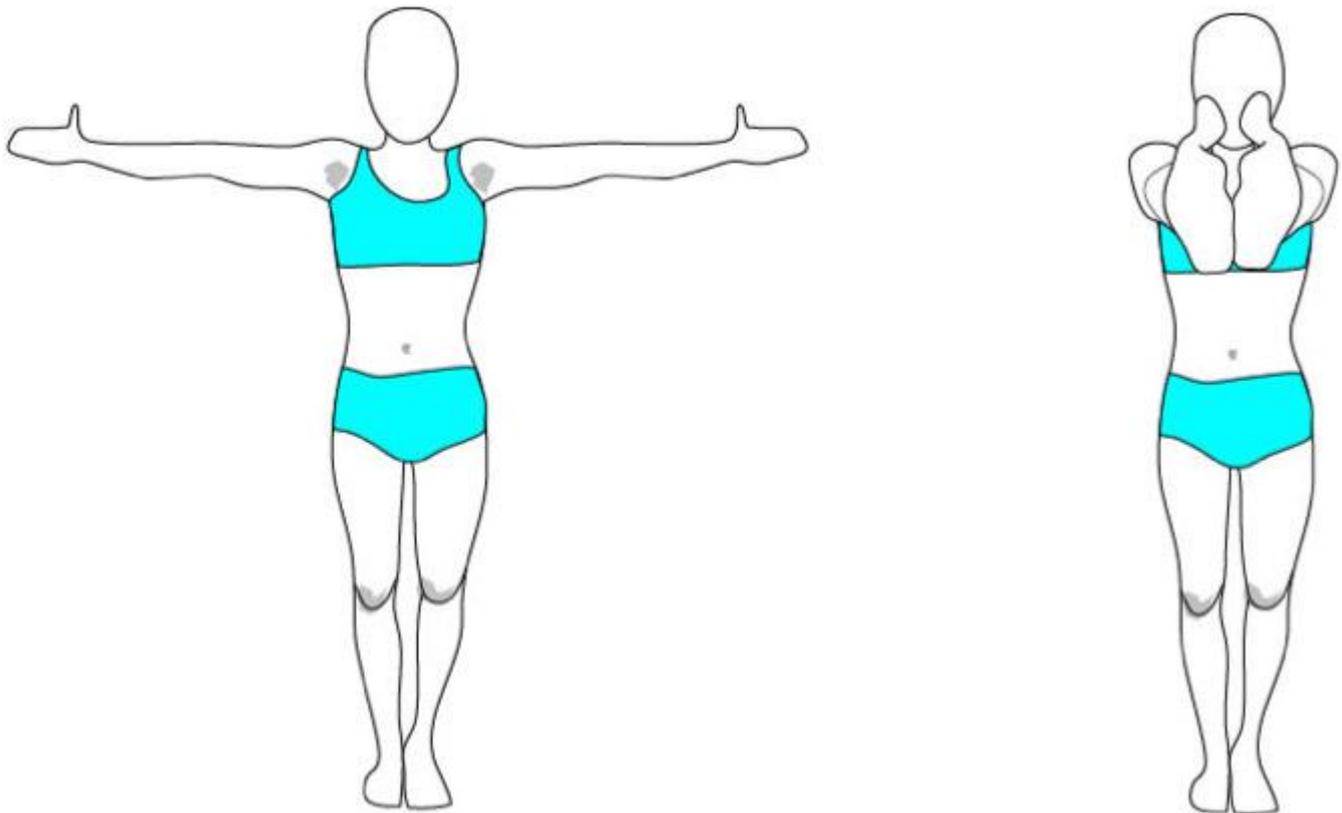


BREATHING EXERCISES FOR RUNNERS – THE DIAPHRAGM

Diaphragm Strengthening Exercises and Stretches

The diaphragm is not the only muscle involved in breathing; there are other accessory muscles. But for now let's look at how to strengthen the diaphragm. Here is a little routine incorporating Pilates and Yoga, as well as running experience. It will not only strengthen your diaphragm, but other muscles too.

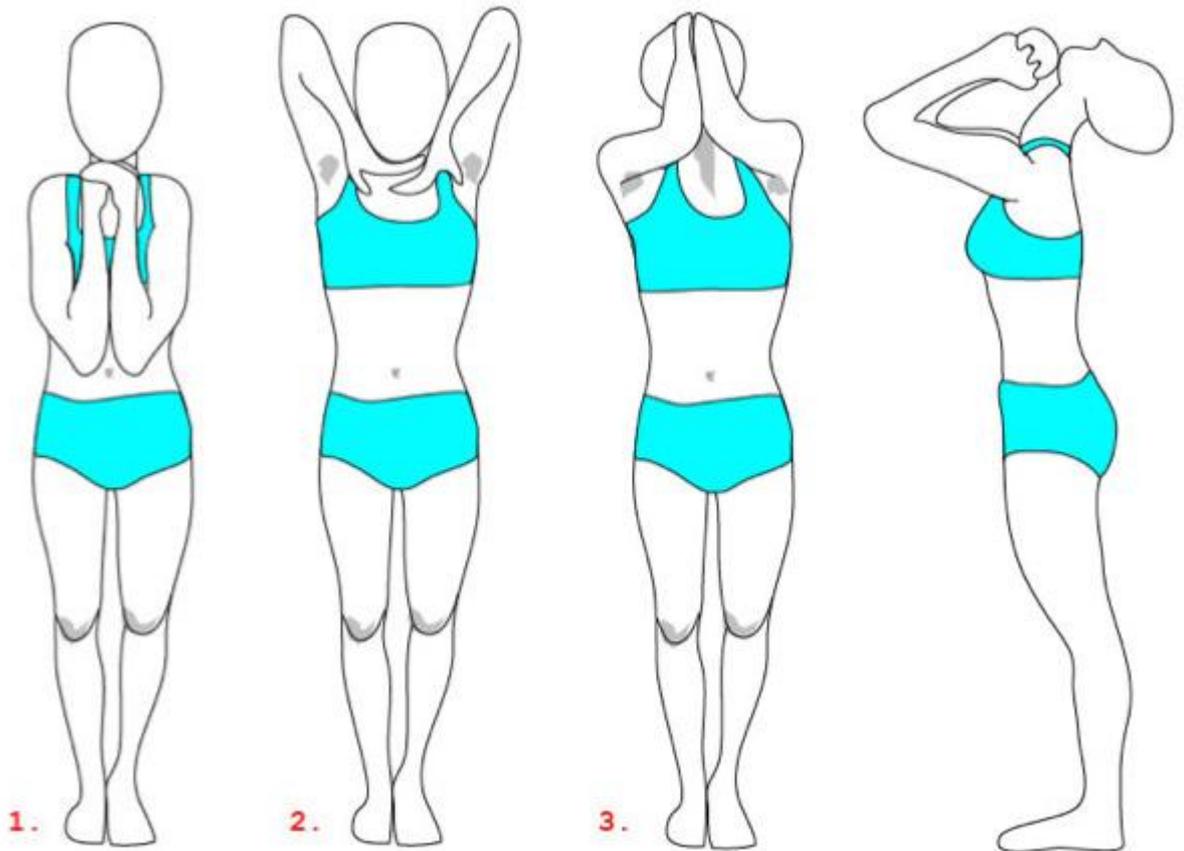
Standing Chest Expansion



Or as my Pilates teacher might call it: 'The Singing Pavarotti'. Stand straight with feet together, heels and toes touching, and activate your glutes. On inhale lift your arms sideways parallel to the floor, hands shoulder height; on exhale close the arms touching the hands in front of you. Make sure inhales and exhales are slow and continuous. Don't let the body collapse. When you breathe in and out, it is only your arms that move. Keep your torso stable, and do not allow your chest to pop out or the back to bend.

Do the 10 sets of inhale and exhale. Then from the same start-up position, on inhale, lift your arms above your head hands facing each other. On exhale lower the arms next to your body, hands facing the floor. Do the ten sets of these too. If you find these exercises difficult you can try and do them on the lying floor, but same rules apply there too.

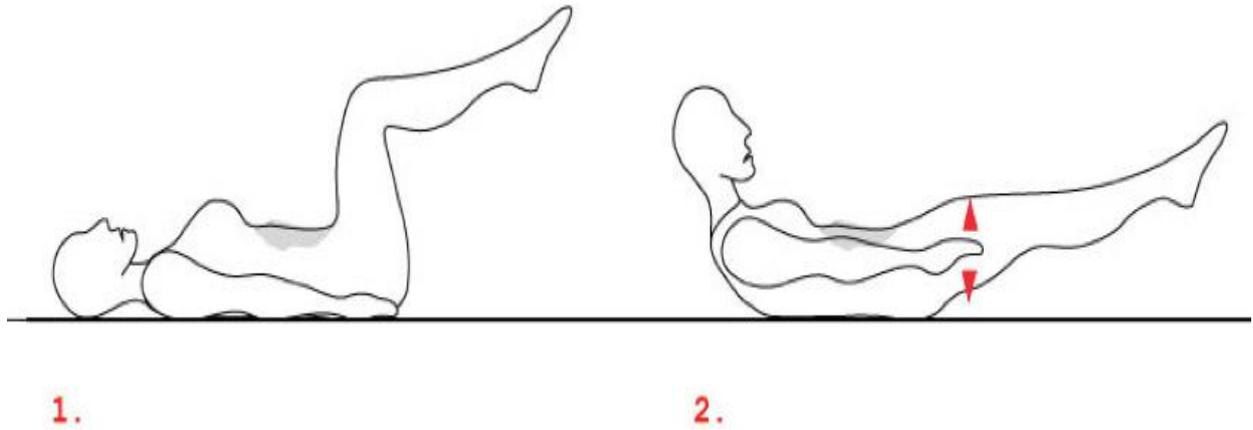
Standing Deep Breathing



Stand straight, with feet together – heels and toes touching. Interlace your knuckles and place the hands under your chin, keeping the elbows together and the thumbs touching the throat (1). On a slow inhale through the nose for a count of six, lift your elbows sideways and lower your chin into the knuckles (2). Pushing your elbows together and dropping the head back, exhale through mouth for a slow count of six (3). The elbows should stay above the shoulders and the knuckles together under the chin.

Do 10 sets of breaths, take a little break and do another 10. This breathing exercise teaches you to sustain your inhales and exhales, and to use your lungs to the maximum.

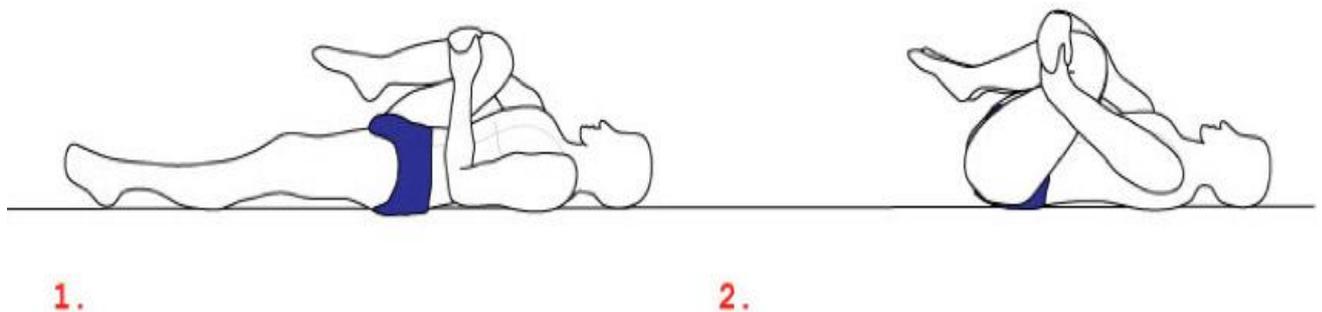
The Hundred



1. To get into the position, lie on your back in tabletop position – feet stretched and parallel to the floor. Breathe in, and on exhale lift your head up, scooping off the floor up to the base of your shoulder blades. Looking at your abs, breathe in. Activate your abs even more, and on exhale lengthen your legs and arms.

2. The lower you stretch your legs, the harder the exercise. I suggest starting slightly higher and work yourself down as your body lets you. Holding this position, inhale on 5 and exhale on 5. As you're taking the short breaths, move your arms up and down. The shoulders and neck should be relaxed.

Wind Removing Pose

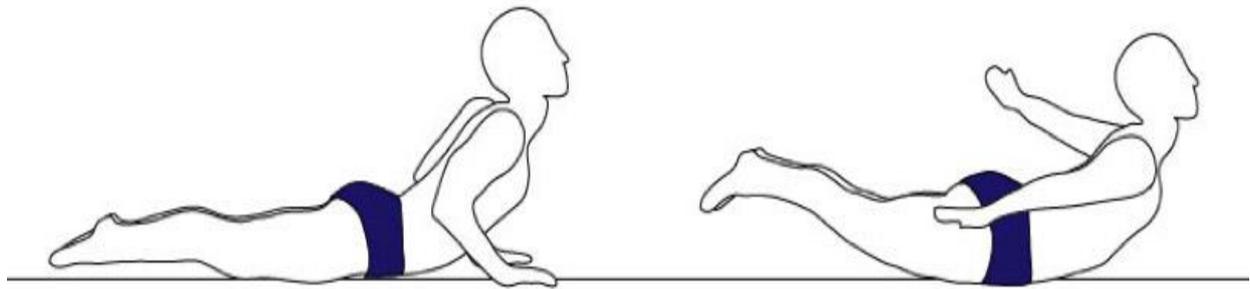


1. I like to do this compressing pose (digestive system) prior to the cobra.

Lying on the floor, bend the right knee towards the chest, and interlocking your fingers above the knee, pull it towards the right shoulder, avoiding the rib cage. Both shoulders should be relaxed on the floor, as well as the spine. Breathing deep and slow, hold this position for 20 seconds. Then change the leg and repeat the posture on the left side for 20 seconds.

2. Then bend both of your knees, wrap your arms around the legs just under the knees, each hand holding the opposite elbow. Ideally the tailbone and the back of the head should be touching the floor, and the shoulders should also be down. Knees should be touching, and you are trying to pull them to the chest. Tuck in your chin, gaze into the little diamond shape created by your forearms and knees. Hold this pose for 20 seconds too.

From Cobra to Full Locust



1.

2.

To get into the Cobra pose (1) lie on your stomach, with legs and feet together. Then place your hands under your shoulders, fingers pointing forward. Your elbows should be touching your sides, with legs and glutes activated. Looking up at the ceiling, lift your head and lift your torso using your back strength. You are arching your torso backwards and pushing the belly button into the floor. Everything from the belly button down should be touching the floor. The shoulders should stay touching your sides, relaxed, keeping the elbows at a 90° angle. This is also a 20-second pose. Come out of the pose as gently and controlled as you went into it.

To get into the full locust pose (2) stay on your stomach, stretch your arms to the sides, palms facing down. Activate the legs, glutes and hips. On a deep inhale, lift your head up looking towards the ceiling, and all at once lift the arms, legs and torso off the floor. You should look like a plane; arms lifted, slightly backward, palms still facing down; the legs should stay together during the whole 10 minutes. The aim is to keep balanced on the hipbones using the strength of the middle and lower spine.