

RESPIRATION Steadying the Hold

[11-time national champion tells how]

David Tubb

It really doesn't mater if you follow a specific breathing pattern on each shot, but it is important to be aware of what that pattern is. What really matters is that your breathing is consistent for that day – especially in the level of air you exhale down to prior to firing. This level of air influences natural point of aim.

Learn to use the natural pattern of your breathing to experience the most effective (steadiest) hold. When we breathe normally we don't inhale as much air as we can hold and then blow it all out, and we also don't breathe continually in and out, in and out. Rather, we simply inhale and exhale to levels that are comfortable to us. Take aim and fire the shot when you have reached what some call the "natural respiratory pause," or the natural resting point prior to inhalation where we are "using" the oxygen we have retained.

ORIGIN: This is an edited excerpt from The Rifle Shooter.

To make a good shot it's necessary to get the sights on target and then fire the rifle without moving the sights. Here is some help.



Respiration

Holding still sometimes takes more thought, and effort, than we might realize.

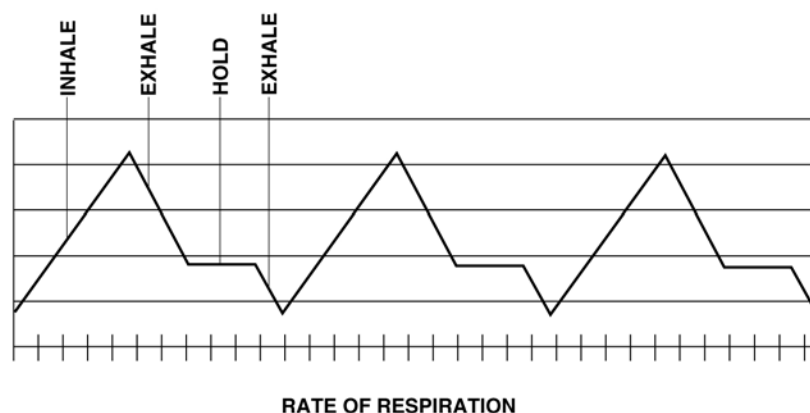
The way to breathe is, for some, a technique unto itself. When we're firing slow-fire rounds I don't think it matters if a shooter makes a certain breathing technique or pattern a fundamental. Due to numerous influences, everyone's breathing pattern can change at different times or on different days. I believe that what is important is making the pattern consistent for the time spent shooting. As I'll discuss more later, the amount of air held in the lungs influences natural point of aim.

I am, however, aware of following a breathing routine in Rapid Fire events. I inhale and exhale between each shot as I operate the bolt and will take one or two deeper breaths during the magazine change. I also take a few deep breaths to oxygenate my body prior to going down to shoot a Rapid Fire event string.

In offhand or slow-fire prone, don't approach either extreme of holding a deep breath or exhaling

fully to make the shot. Either can adversely affect the hold.

In offhand, part of my routine is taking a few deeper than normal breaths between shots so my body will have enough oxygen, but nothing is forced. As I mount the gun and move it to the target, I breathe out as I would normally in any other circumstance, exhaling until I am comfortable. I then hold or retain that level of air in my lungs and take the shot. It's an unmistakable feeling when the body needs oxygen, and that is not





the time to be over-holding to force a shot. The muscles burn and the vision falters, and there is a marked unsteadiness in the hold. Start over.

To make compensating npa changes shooting prone under time pressure (already firing a string, for instance), moving the right knee up or back should push the rifle over to the left (leg more bent) or right (leg more straight), and elevation adjustments can be effected by altering the amount of air held in the lungs. In prone or sitting, hold a little more air to lower the sights and a little less to raise them (the reverse is true in offhand). On that note, I will never accept a natural vertical alignment that shows the front sight holding a little over (higher) its centered location on the aiming black. Ideally, my natural point of aim will have the front aperture naturally centered up and down over the target -- with the amount of air I'm holding that day -- but I never want to see it holding higher. A little lower is okay, if it can't be dead on. The reason is that it's easier to exhale a little more air to raise the front sight than to inhale more air to lower it. This is a factor in the 300 Rapid Fire event more than in a slow fire string. If the shooter has focused on natural point of aim in his training, there shouldn't be much adjustment or compensation needed to attain perfect alignment, and there can't be much until it's necessary to make a fundamental alteration in body alignment to get naturally on target. Either compensation I mentioned is only good, in my estimation, for making no more alignment change than half the width of the aiming black, or let's say taking natural alignment from an "8" to a "10."

In establishing natural point of aim, it is extremely important to use the same breathing and tension as one experiences in live fire. I say this because these things are all a part of shooting mechanics. For instance, a holding tension anything less than what's experienced on a shot can corrupt the feedback. This is especially influential in the sitting position and also, for many, in the prone position used for the Rapid Fire event.

The idea of using the amount of air held in the lungs to alter vertical alignment gives a good example of why it's the consistency of one's breathing that's important.

Breathe to live, don't live to breathe, but be aware of a pattern, keep it consistent, and use it as a tool if needed.

Conditioning

A shooter's beating heart can have a good deal of influence on his capability to maintain a consistent sight picture. Specifically, pulse beat can be transmitted from the shooter to the rifle, causing unwanted

(although usually predictable) movement in the sights. This, of course, becomes a greater and greater influence the tighter the sling tension and the more forceful and rapid the heartbeat becomes.

The source of pulse is the heart (which of course is not within the shooter's control), but the influences pulse has on the rifle can be reduced.



First, the shooter's physical condition will influence both how forcefully the heart beats as well as how

I take a few extra breaths between shots to give my body more oxygen but the breathing pattern is normal. I don't exhale down to my holding point until I am moving the rifle to the target. I then hold that amount of air for the duration of the shot.

In conditions where you may need to hold a little longer, be aware of the need for oxygen and never try to ignore it. Take the rifle down and start over.

I follow a respiration pattern in Rapid Fire, inhaling and exhaling during bolt operation for every shot. One of the biggest adjustments I had to make during the time I shot a semi-automatic was remembering to breathe between rounds! To reduce the effect of pulse on my hold, I loosen my pants to help prevent any cutting in that can generate a pulse point.

quickly a more rapidly beating heart returns to its normal pace. Physical exertion and mental stress can elevate pulse rate, and shooters often experience both on the firing line. Not only for reasons of shooting better, I have exercised regularly over virtually my entire shooting career. I have tried different means of aerobic exercise and often go back and forth, but I have had very good results using a stationary bicycle. Any effort made to adhere to a program whereby the heart, as a muscle, is exercised will pay off for anyone.

Restrictive clothing can also generate excessive pulse. The sitting position is one wherein many shooters complain of pulse-induced holding errors. I have found that this most often comes from around the waist rather than from the sling. I always undo the top button on my trousers as well as let my belt out a notch as part of my pre-string event preparation. A little extra “padding” around the middle doesn’t help, and now we’re back to keeping fit.

For more information about David Tubb and his Superior Shooting Systems Inc., click [HERE](#).