

And relax...

Maureen Marriner gets a summer revamp, from the inside, out.

WITH AN eye to a bit of end-of-year revitalisation I am after some inside-and-out TLC, both available from Re-ab in Auckland's Grey Lynn, which advertises itself as a one-stop shop for many health and wellbeing needs.

My first appointment is with Dinah Bradley, a co-founder of Breathing Works, Australasia's first independent breathing pattern disorders clinic.

I say I think I am a shallow breather and regularly – usually at work – find myself having to take a large gulp of air. So what is good breathing?

"It is moving air in and out of the chest with the minimum effort and using the chest muscles to their best advantage," says Bradley.

The diaphragm, attached to the lower edges of the ribs, is designed to supply the correct amount of air during rest or normal activity; the chest muscles join the ribs together and tighten to lift them – they use 20 per cent more energy than the diaphragm. During moderate to strong exercise the upper chest opens like a reserve tank to let in more oxygen-rich air. In strenuous exercise the neck and shoulder muscles tense and lift the upper chest.

In normal, relaxed breathing, 70-80 per cent of the work is done by the diaphragm, the lower chest muscles do about 20-30 per cent and the accessory muscles are on stand-by for extremes of effort or stress.

But many of us don't have normal, relaxed breathing.

tucked in all the time it's very difficult to do the relaxed, belly breathing that is good for us," says Bradley and I think of gym instructors' admonition to "set the core" that I regularly use to align my spine. If the muscles in the front are all tight it is impossible to have a relaxed belly.

Bradley lies me down and prods the muscles below my collarbone. "Ouch!"

She asks if that hurt. "Only when you jab them like that," I reply. She assures me she was not jabbing but says the muscles are "hard, hard, hard".

She gets me to put my left hand on my upper chest and the right over my belly button. I have to take a deep breath and note three things: which part of my chest moved first; which part moves most; and did I breathe through my nose or my mouth. Obviously, where I was and with whom, I breathed through my nose like a good girl but then switching to mouth breathing, I could feel my upper chest moving more.

"The normal pattern of breathing often changes from abdominal breathing to upper chest breathing," says Bradley, often through the mouth, leading to musculo-skeletal changes of upper chest and neck muscles which in turn causes pain, tension and headaches.

My breathing pattern has rarely caused me anxiety but therapists say one in 10 people, of all ages, experience some form of breathing pattern disorder or chronic overbreathing at some time.

Bradley gives me some homework and a checklist,



When in doubt – breathe out.

breathe out, and advising to keep my lips together, jaw relaxed and keep the breathing low and slow.

There is also a breathing and posture check called Stop, Drop and Flop. Stop – check chest. Drop – shoulders down. Flop – relax all over.

MY NEXT appointment – for the outer me – is with Lynda Davenport, who has been trained in, among other things, crystal

your life but have you been doing it right? Photo: iStock

from Greatness and Raw (Rekindled Ancient Wisdom). I'm not surprised to be led to a gently lit room, with aroma candles burning and soft music playing.

Davenport tells me Facial Radiance is a treatment for the face, head and neck that "reduces and prevents the ageing process, releasing stress dramatically and bringing your whole self back into radiance".

The hour-long appointment includes a head and foot massage but most of the time is spent massaging my face, one side then the other. She tells me she is following my meridian lines as she kneads across my face with fingertips.

Davenport says lines, furrows and sagging are the consequence of muscles that retain accumulated stress from a lifetime of events and emotions. "Muscles released of this stress become toned. Blood, circulation and lymphatic flow are increased which refines and clarifies skin texture and increases collagen elastin production."

Halfway through the process I sit up and Davenport hands me a mirror. The side that has been worked on does look brighter, with more definition around the jaw. At the end I am fully relaxed and believe I do look brighter. Davenport recommends five treatments over five weeks for a more permanent result.

Fact file:

Re-ab, 2 Selbourne St, Grey Lynn, Auckland, ph (09) 360-2929, www.reab.co.nz
Visit www.breathingworks.com and www.facialradiance.co.nz for more information.

Hyperventilation Syndrome: Breathing Pattern Disorders by Dinah Bradley, Random House, RRP