

## **Reducing your Breathing Rate**

### **Written by Mark Powell**

Breathing rate varies widely from one diver to another. Some divers seem to go through their air very quickly while others seem to have gills as they use very little. For many dives your gas consumption is what limits the length of dive you can do and so improving your breathing rate can have a significant impact on the length of dive you can do. This article gives a number of easy to follow tips on how you can improve your gas consumption.

#### **Buoyancy control.**

Buoyancy control is one of the key skills in diving and has a major impact on your breathing rate. If you are struggling with your buoyancy you will be breathing harder and are likely to be putting more air in and out of your bcd/wing and dry suit. This can especially be the case during an ascent. Divers with poor buoyancy control tend to say that they prefer to be heavy rather than light. Of course experienced divers know that it's better to be neutrally buoyant at all times rather than being heavy or light. If you are negatively buoyant then during an ascent you will have to swim up the whole way. This involves much more effort than a neutral ascent which will result in more work and heavier breathing.

#### **Correct Weighting.**

The first step in getting your buoyancy under control is to be correctly weighted. If, like most divers, you are over weighted then you will need to put more air in to your bcd/wing in order to compensate. Adding this air can have a significant impact on your overall gas consumption. By reducing your weighting you can reduce the amount of air you need to offset this weight. Improved buoyancy control will also have a significant effect on how relaxed you are.

#### **Get fit.**

Fitness has a big impact on your breathing rate. As you improve your fitness levels then you will find that your breathing rate will drop, you will be less likely to get out of breath during periods of exertion and your breathing rate will return back to your normal rate faster.

#### **Swim horizontal.**

Many divers swim in a semi upright position with the body at an angle of around 45 degrees. This results in a larger surface area having to be pushed through the water. This increases the drag and you will have to work harder to push your body through the water. Working harder will require more effort which will cause you to breathe harder and use more gas. By swimming in a horizontal position you greatly reduce the surface area that has to be pushed through the water. This reduces the effort and so reduces the amount of gas you will breathe

#### **Relax.**

If you are relaxed in the water then your breathing rate will naturally drop. If you are stressed, nervous or working hard then your breathing rate will inevitably rise and you will go through your gas faster. Integrated air computers can make this worse leading to the diver becoming fixated on the breathing rate readout. As this increases they become increasingly stressed and so their breathing rate increases further. In order stay relaxed take the time to run through everything before the dive, ensure that you have sorted all the niggling little problems with kit that may be introducing stress. Dive with a buddy that you have confidence in, practice your skills regularly and dive within your abilities. Together with a gradual build up in your experience this will ensure you are relaxed on the dive. After all it's supposed to be fun.

**Slow down.**

If you spend the whole dive swimming around at maximum speed then your breathing rate and hence air consumption is bound to be higher. You are also likely to miss many of the best parts of the dive. So slow down, enjoy the dive, keep your breathing rate under control and watch your air consumption start to drop.

**Stay shallow.**

As we get deeper we breathe in more gas with every breath. At 10m we are breathing twice the volume with every breath that we would breathe on the surface. By staying just a few metres shallower we can reduce our gas usage. So, rather than dropping all the way to the bottom of the wreck, by staying higher, up on the decks, we can extend the time our gas will last.

**Dive lots.**

By far the best way to reduce your air consumption is to spend as much time as possible in the water. As your confidence and skills increase you will become increasingly relaxed in the water which will ensure your air consumption gradually drops.

Mark Powell is one of the UK's leading technical diving instructors. Mark has been diving since 1987 and instructing since 1994. He is one of only a few full time technical diving instructors in the UK and teaches all levels up to and including Advanced Trimix. Mark runs training courses around the UK as well as regularly running training trips to Cyprus, Malta and the Red Sea.

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