

Healthy inhales

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Deadly airborne coronavirus particulates, smoke from rampant wildfires and sociopolitical strife are generating heightened attention to air and breath quality, making the practice of purified breathing central to overall health. From technology to wellness, breath is coming into focus as key pillar for consumer wellbeing.

More air quality data is being collected than ever before, and being made publicly available through initiatives such as the Air Quality Index and apps such as AirNow and PurpleAir. Designer Huachen Xin's Pollution Ranger and Smog Shade art installation, unveiled in September as a prototype in London and Shanghai, offers free real-time air pollution monitoring to public viewers.

Alongside this heightened attention comes growth in the breath tech market. The global air purifier market is expected to grow over 42% by 2025, according to a September 2020 Emergen Research report, and Google Trends indicates that searches for air purifiers are at a five-year high. The CleanLight Air, released by KeySmart in August 2020, is a portable air purifier that kills germs using UV-C light. In September, LG unveiled the reusable PuriCare air purifying mask, which offers the same filters used in the company's home products in a wearable form. In addition to rising demand for personal devices, large-scale air purification protocols are being put in place for [public spaces](#). New York Governor Andrew Cuomo mandated that New York City malls must have air systems that filter out COVID-19 in order to be permitted to reopen from September 9.

Unsurprisingly, people are examining not only what they breathe, but how—leading to a growing awareness that the way we breathe can have an enormous effect on our wellbeing. Of late, many in the wellness world, including breathwork coach Richie “The Breath Guy” Bostock, have seen a surge of interest in breath technique. Bostock extolls the practice of controlled breathing as “the next revolution in health and wellness.” An August 2020 article in the Guardian contends that becoming a better breather can help improve sleep and immune function, and reduce blood pressure and anxiety levels, among other benefits. Bostock's advice? “Breathe with purpose.”

One such purpose, suggests breathwork instructor Regina Rocke, is to work through social injustice. “What is the impact of days of exposure to violence, media, and social media? You can breathe to find different ways to cope with that and try to calm your nervous system, your adrenals, and your mind,” she said in a recent interview with Bon Appétit.

Katara McCarty agrees, which is why she launched Exhale, an app providing emotional wellbeing to Black, Indigenous, Women of Color (BIWOC), in August. “As we learn to pause and connect to our breath through breathing techniques, this is where our power lies,” she told Refinery29. “Connecting to our breath becomes a form of resistance against systemic racism.”

Activist and healer Rachel Ricketts, interviewed about breathwork in the Cut, maintained that

“physically, [breath] relieves our muscles, spiritually it allows for a major release.”

In recent months, consumers have been reassessing their relationship with fresh air, as airborne COVID-19 contaminants have brought heightened attention to indoor air quality and raging wildfires have done the same for outdoor air quality. This growing awareness of what and how we breathe is also strengthening the link between breath and wellness, giving rise to new wellbeing offerings that focus on breathwork. From air purifiers to mindful breathing practices, consumers are seeking new ways to breathe easier—making purified air a sought-after commodity. Will clean air be the new bottled water?