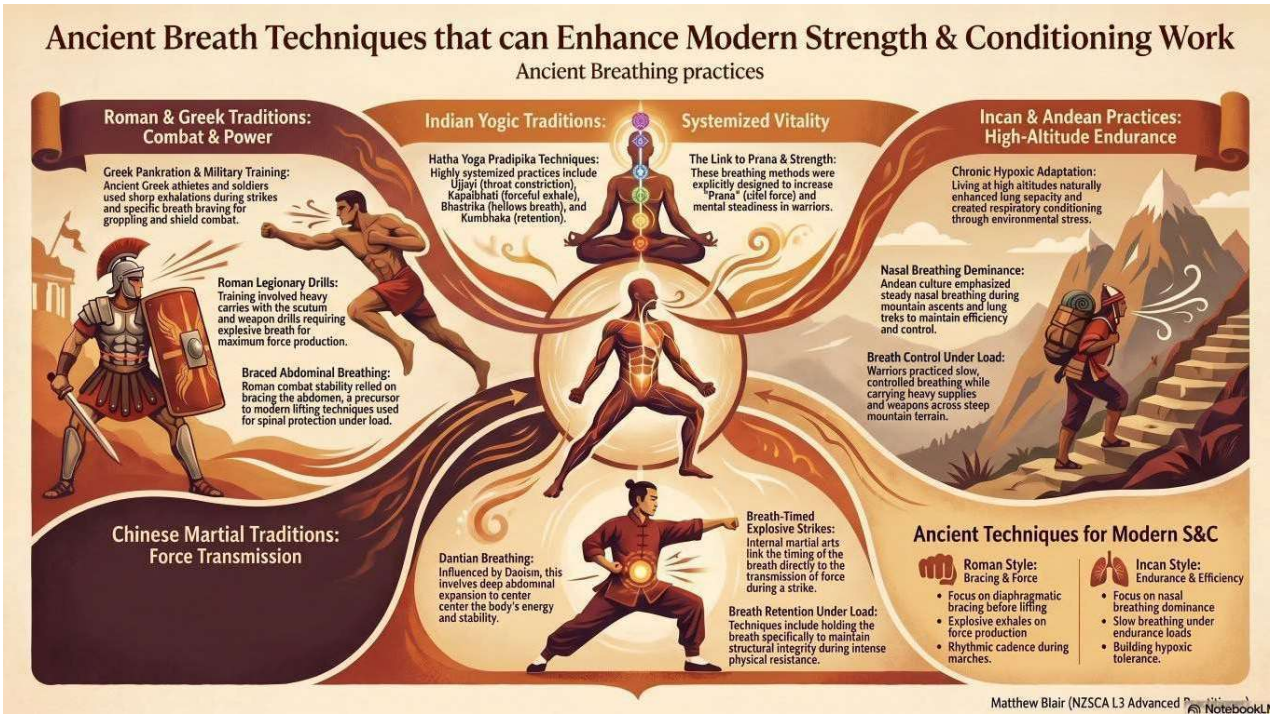
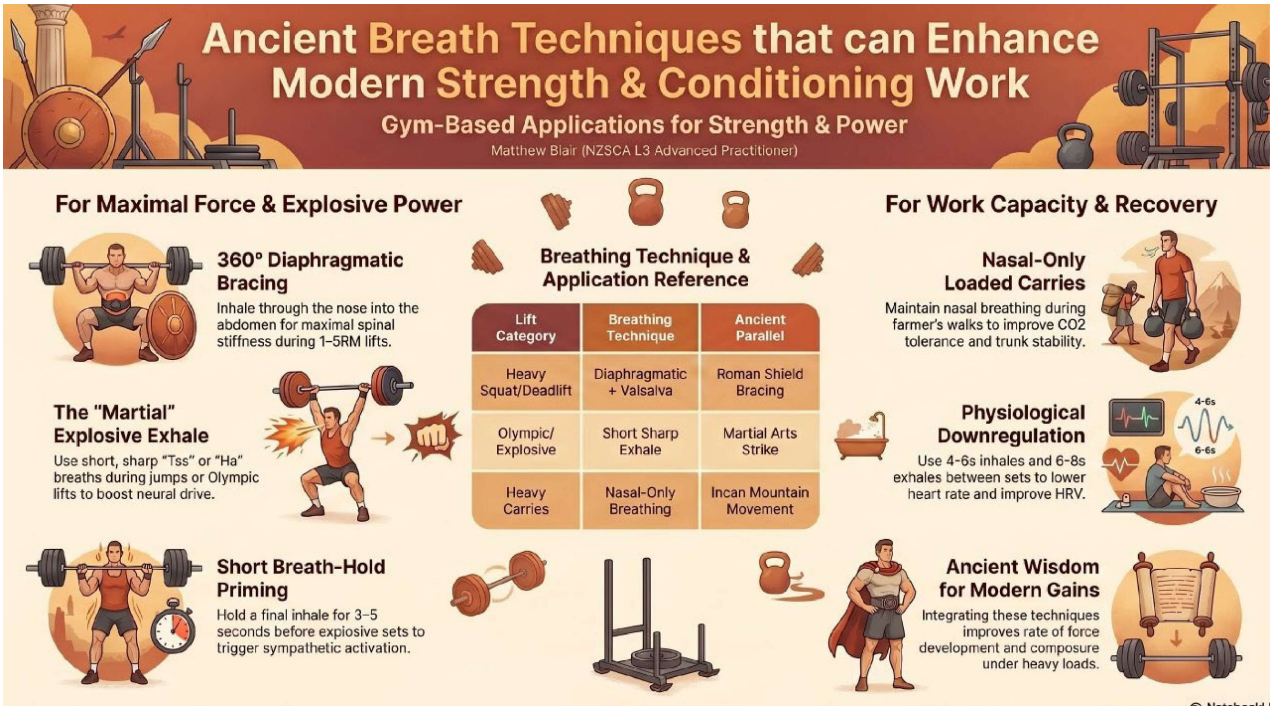


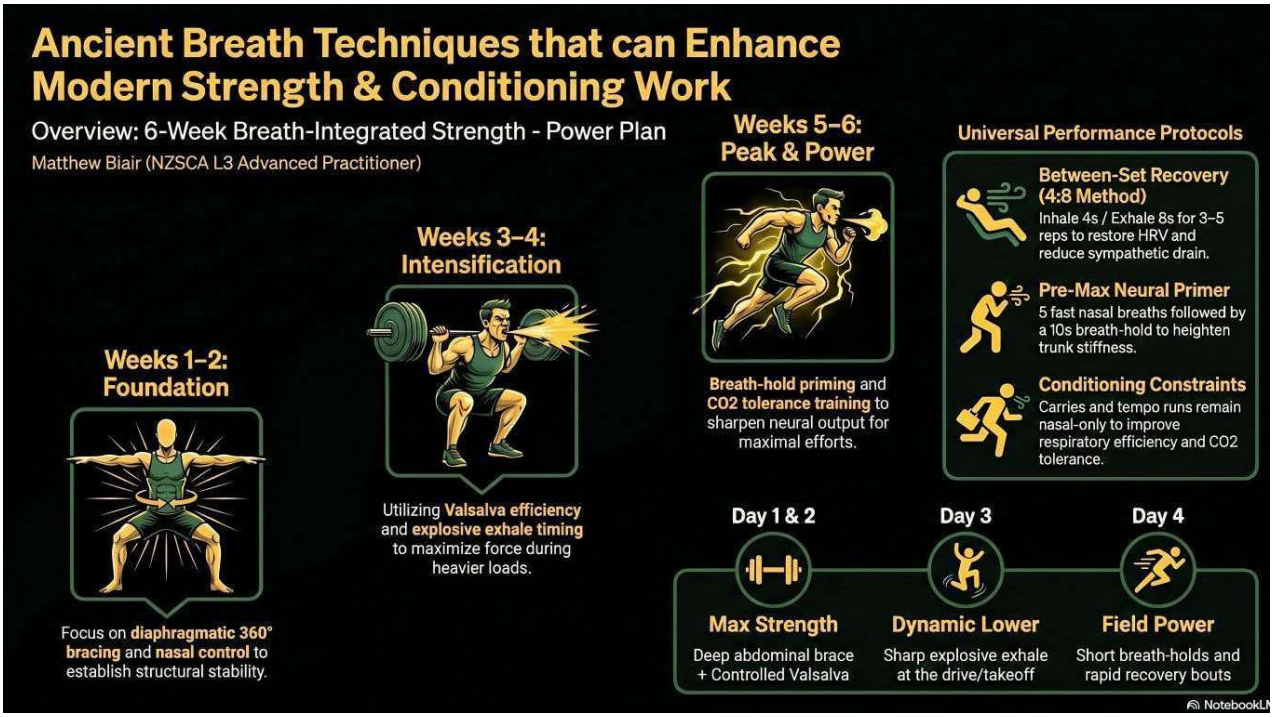
Ancient Breath Techniques that can Enhance Modern Strength & Conditioning Work

Matthew Blair (NZSCA L3 Advanced Practitioner)

- Ancient Breathing practices
- Gym-Based Applications for Strength
- Overview: 6-Week Strength Plan


Ancient Breath Techniques that can Enhance Modern Strength & Conditioning Work
Ancient Breathing practices
Roman & Greek Traditions: Combat & Power
Greek Pankration & Military Training: Ancient Greek athletes and soldiers used sharp exhalations during strikes and specific breath bracing for grappling and shield combat.
Roman Legionary Drills: Training involved heavy carries with the scutum and weapon drills requiring explosive breath for maximum force production.
Braced Abdominal Breathing: Roman combat stability relied on bracing the abdomen, a precursor to modern lifting techniques used for spinal protection under load.
Indian Yogic Traditions: Systemized Vitality
Hatha Yoga Pradipika Techniques: Highly systemized practices include Ujjayi (throat constriction), Kapalbhati (forceful exhale), Bhastrika (bellows breath), and Kumbhaka (retention).
The Link to Prana & Strength: These breathing methods were explicitly designed to increase "Prana" (life force) and mental steadiness in warriors.
Incan & Andean Practices: High-Altitude Endurance
Chronic Hypoxic Adaptation: Living at high altitudes naturally enhanced lung capacity and created respiratory conditioning through environmental stress.
Nasal Breathing Deminance: Andean culture emphasized steady nasal breathing during mountain ascents and lung treks to maintain efficiency and control.
Breath Control Under Load: Warriors practiced slow, controlled breathing while carrying heavy supplies and weapons across steep mountain terrain.
Chinese Martial Traditions: Force Transmission
Dantian Breathing: Influenced by Daoism, this involves deep abdominal expansion to center center the body's energy and stability.
Breath-Timed Explosive Strikes: Internal martial arts link the timing of the breath directly to the transmission of force during a strike.
Breath Retention Under Load: Techniques include holding the breath specifically to maintain structural integrity during intense physical resistance.
Ancient Techniques for Modern S&C
Roman Style: Bracing & Force
Focus on diaphragmatic bracing before lifting
Explosive exhales on force production
Rhythmic cadence during marches.
Incan Style: Endurance & Efficiency
Focus on nasal breathing dominance
Slow breathing under endurance loads
Building hypoxic tolerance.
Matthew Blair (NZSCA L3 Advanced


Ancient Breath Techniques that can Enhance Modern Strength & Conditioning Work
Gym-Based Applications for Strength & Power
Matthew Blair (NZSCA L3 Advanced Practitioner)
For Maximal Force & Explosive Power
360° Diaphragmatic Bracing
Inhale through the nose into the abdomen for maximal spinal stiffness during 1–5RM lifts.
The "Martial" Explosive Exhale
Use short, sharp "Tss" or "Ha" breaths during jumps or Olympic lifts to boost neural drive.
Short Breath-Hold Priming
Hold a final inhale for 3–5 seconds before explosive sets to trigger sympathetic activation.
Breathing Technique & Application Reference
Lift Category | Breathing Technique | Ancient Parallel
Heavy Squat/Deadlift | Diaphragmatic + Valsalva | Roman Shield Bracing
Olympic/ Explosive | Short Sharp Exhale | Martial Arts Strike
Heavy Carries | Nasal-Only Breathing | Incan Mountain Movement
For Work Capacity & Recovery
Nasal-Only Loaded Carries
Maintain nasal breathing during farmer's walks to improve CO2 tolerance and trunk stability.
Physiological Downregulation
Use 4-6s inhales and 6-8s exhales between sets to lower heart rate and improve HRV.
4-6s
6-6s
Ancient Wisdom for Modern Gains
Integrating these techniques improves rate of force development and composure under heavy loads.



Ancient breath techniques can enhance rate of force development with both Strength & Power patterns.

Key:

1) **Diaphragmatic bracing**
2) **Valsalva efficiency**
3) **Breath-hold priming and $C0_2$ tolerance training**

Notes: