

Breathe. Breathe. Hold your breath... Breathe.



One more thing scratched off the "things to do before I die list." My first CT scan, part of my ongoing quest to figure out how to climb faster by breathing better. Part A was my first spirometry test a couple years ago, with Qvar prescribed as a twice-daily ritual, and Albuterol added before each ride. Results were not impressive; my climbing speed continued to decline. I might have just written it off as what happens as you get older, but after getting some really good results taking meds for my Raynauds (ice-cold hands due to "events" that trigger circulation shutdowns to the extremities), I decided to go after my lungs again.

A couple weeks ago, I had another Spirometry test, this time including a test after exercising, to confirm the presumed diagnosis of exercise-induced-asthma. Funny thing though; my breathing actually improved a bit after a tough (320 watt) workout. That unexpected result has led to further testing, part of which was today's time spent having a CT scan. Let me tell you, it's a borderline thrill!

Before describing the procedure, I'll commend Kaiser Redwood City for their efficiency. My appointment was for 9:45am with a request to arrive 30 minutes prior. I arrive shortly after 9am, was brought into the imaging room (sounds like something from Quantum Leap) at 9:20 and was out the door by 9:35! The only drama was figuring out how the darned gown thing worked.

OK, the procedure. You're lying flat on a table, arms folded above/behind your head (not suspended in air or anything, just lying on the table behind you). You're asked if you can hold your breath for 10 seconds (um... yeah), explained that a voice will tell you what to do (which sounds a bit creepy, thinking about a line from a song in the 80s "My voice is the last you will ever hear. Don't be alarmed."), and keep your eyes closed. The object is to lie perfectly still.

It starts. The voice says "Breathe." OK, I'm breathing. I'm breathing. I'm still breathing! Then it says "Hold your breath." Maybe it's a full 10 seconds before it tells you to "breathe" again, but it seemed shorter than that. You're told to "breathe" for maybe 20 seconds, and then "Hold your breath" again. Cycle repeats. Over. And over. And over. While holding your breath, you can hear the machine, which encircles you, move forward or backward, a step at a time. There's also a whirling motion, which eventually stops, then restarts at a different pitch (changes speed).

My assumption is that the "Hold your breath" part is the only time they're taking x-rays/pictures of you, the idea being that you're motionless when holding your breath, for a better picture. Or maybe it's because it helps to maintain a fixed position over time; holding your breath doesn't allow you to relax into some semi-random state.

Eventually, it's over. Might have been 10 minutes, but I can see where it might seem far longer than that to some, shorter to others. Not sure why they had me close my eyes; other family members who have had cat scans weren't told to do that. I do wonder if the entire process could have gone more quickly if they could change the "hold your breath" timing to something longer. 15 seconds would have been fine; even 20 would be comfortable.

Now I wait to see what super-detailed pictures of my lungs look like. My guess? Gross. Just like everybody's else's. Last test in this series will be an ECG, to see if there are any heart-related issues that might be the culprit. I'm actually looking forward to that part, as the only ECG I've had previously was for a life insurance physical, some years back. Not a bad thing to know what shape my heart's in, I'm thinking! --Mike--