

Virgil breathwork coach helps with anxiety, depression

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1 / 4 Breathwork coach Tabatha DeBruyn in her Virgil studio. | Sharon Burns

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I've never been one to lie still during the savasana yoga position, or to meditate without silently counting the seconds until it's over. So when I agreed to try transformational breathwork with Niagara-on-the-Lake resident and breathwork practitioner, Tabatha DeBruyn, I arrived curious, sceptical, and fully prepared to fail at sitting still.

DeBruyn explained she moved with her family to NOTL almost six years ago, leaving behind a busy life and booming business in Kitchener. “We used to come here for date days, and we just thought, we really want to slow down,” she said. “More and more of my business was going online and we were just ready for a different pace.”

What she does now is not simple to summarize, but she says the heart of her work is “helping people get from where they are to where they want to be, or more importantly, from how they’re feeling to how they want to feel.”

She calls it ‘transformational breathwork,’ and explains it as a blend of physiology and psychology: changing the body first so the mind becomes more receptive, less reactive and more able to shift entrenched patterns. “When we change how the body is regulated, the mind is going to be more open, more receptive and move away from negative bias,” she said.

Her approach includes somatics, hypnotic suggestion, mindset coaching and a specialized method called 9D breathwork, which layers breathing patterns with sound frequencies, music, binaural beats. “It’s science-based,” she said. “We use different frequencies for different parts of the journey. Music is such a powerful mover of emotion.”

Before she arrived in this field, DeBruyn spent 15 years as a high school teacher. A side business in wellness grew so successful she left the classroom. She later earned degrees in metaphysical psychology, trained in rapid transformational hypnotherapy in the U.K. and studied breathwork with Bali-based teacher Brian Kelly, founder of Breath Masters and 9D Breathwork.

Her own turning point came after the death of her mother, when she found herself struggling with functional depression she hid from everyone. “My hands were going numb, my heart was palpitating, I couldn’t sleep. I had written a book on coping skills and I still couldn’t figure it out. I was embarrassed,” she said.

A 90-minute online breathwork session changed her. “I was a different person on the other side of it. I felt such peace.” DeBruyn said she didn’t relive anything traumatic, but she was able to understand it, and let it go. “I had a better relationship with my mom, even though she wasn’t here.”

Now, many of her clients are through referrals. “Many are unfulfilled in some capacity,” she said. “They know they’re destined for more. Some say one session feels like 10 years of therapy, and they didn’t have to talk.”

She works with individuals and families, as well as corporations, on stress, burnout and anxiety. Breathwork for grief, addiction support and youth mental health are also growing parts of her practice. She is currently exploring opportunities with a local youth mental health unit and has

developed several guided 9D programs, including 'Breathing Through Grief and Loss' and the popular Letting Go.'

For all of this, she insists breathwork is not new – just newly appreciated. "It's been done for centuries. It's scientifically the fastest way to change the state of the body and mind. And yet it's not mainstream. But it's coming."

At the end of our interview, DeBruyn invited me for a short version of her breathwork process, just a few minutes of down-regulating breath, followed by an activation pattern, in the warm and inviting second-floor studio in her home.

I settled onto a double-thick yoga mat, lying flat with a sleep mask pulled over my eyes to block out light and distraction. A blanket covered me, grounding me, while headphones delivered a shifting soundscape, sometimes a guiding voice in one ear, sometimes music in the other, sometimes both at once. I felt held in a way I didn't expect: safe inside a small cocoon of sound and stillness, tethered yet somehow free to let my lungs and mind expand.

The down-regulation was surprisingly subtle: a slow inhale through the nose, inflating the belly like a balloon, followed by a long exhale. I felt my shoulders drop almost instantly.

The activation, though, was something else entirely.

With one hand on my chest and one on my belly, I inhaled deeply through my mouth and let it go. We repeated this several times. By the third breath I felt heat rush through my body, by the fifth, I was slightly light-headed – a perfectly normal response, she explained later, as blood flow shifts and the prefrontal cortex quiets.

"This is the beginning of opening the subconscious mind," she said. "Most people don't realize they're living in a constant state of fight-flight-freeze."

She wasn't wrong. For someone who can barely get through a yoga corpse pose I was shocked by how quickly my body shifted. It wasn't dramatic. Just...softening. A sense of space. A little more air.

A typical two-hour journey includes guided grounding, instruction, a 40-minute active breath sequence, layered sound, music and suggestions through headphones, followed by integration. Sessions can be private or in groups. She's guided rooms of six in NOTL and crowds of 500 in Las Vegas, she said.

"It's about creating a safe place for people to let go of what they no longer need," she added. "And to become open to what they truly deserve."

After experiencing just a tiny glimpse of it, I understand why people come back. For someone who cannot meditate, breathe slowly on command, or lie still for more than 30 seconds, even that short practice left me feeling unexpectedly clear.

And I didn't count the seconds once.

To learn more or to book a session, visit Tabatha DeBruyn's website at tabatha.online.

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