Breathing Exercises:

The goal of these exercises is to co-ordinate the diaphragm, the chest/ribcage and the abdominal wall.

Co-ordination is the key, not sheer strength although a degree of strength and suppleness will be achieved through the practice of the following exercises.

The exercises should all be practiced daily, preferably at the start of each practice session, although they can also be practiced at any other time of the day. The exercise lying on your back is extremely good for your sense of well-being and your health.

To get the most from these exercises you need;

1. The will to make it happen
2. Concentration
3. Energy
4. Patience

The Diaphragm

A sheet of muscle at the base of the lungs. When creating a tone this should be under tension throughout exhalation to help control it's movement.

The Abdominal Wall Muscles

The muscles that work in opposition to the diaphragm. We cannot touch the diaphragm but if the abdomen which we can physically touch is firm then automatically the diaphragm is firm. The same principal is used in most muscles in the human body. Compare to the movement of the bicep and tricep.

The cough or laugh is a reflex, which forces the adult breath into full supported diaphragmatic operation. Firm up the same muscles that you feel tense up when you cough and keep them firm as you exhale.

Here are some exercises to improve your co-ordination.

Exercise 1

1. Lie on your back with your knees raised and a pile of books the width of your hand behind your head.

2. Close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing.

3. When you feel relaxed place you hands on your chest.

4. Exhale completely pushing in the stomach and surrounding rib-cage. In yoga they suggest trying to feel the spine with the inner stomach wall.
5. Breath into the base of your lungs, aim the air towards your lower back and tummy making your tummy rise and fall but try to keep your chest down. Make a few attempts then rest and try again. Once perfected make the breath as full as possible, stretching the diaphragm as flat as possible.

If you find the movement is limited or you find it hard to control the right muscles try placing a reasonably heavy book on your tummy and make it rise and fall.

Exercise 2

1. Breathe out as above.

2. Take a breath, starting as above then once this lower area is full inflate the rib-cage region.

3. Place hands on chest

4. Breath out and in only from the tummy/diaphragm, and try to stop the chest from falling

Take small breaths to begin with; increase the amount as you become more co-ordinated. As above once perfected make the breaths as full as possible.

Exercise 3

1. Breath out

2. Fill lower area as described

3. Fill rib-cage

4. Exhale from tummy only keeping rib-cage up as *Ex.2*

5. Exhale from rib-cage and relax for a minute.

This exercise should be practiced until it becomes a slow, smooth, wave-like motion. The top of the breath should be as full as possible and when empty be completely empty.

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NOW: Practice your long tones concentrating on the inward breath as you practiced above. When breathing through the note exhale from the bottom up keeping the abdomen firm *at all times* until you run out of air. Listen to the sound and focus the tone.
Try the following Trevor Wye flute tone exercises

N.B. Keep all other parts of the body relaxed particularly the throat.

The Throat

We need a relaxed throat when playing so that the tongue and the larynx can move effectively in sympathy with the desired changes in register and to allow the performer to colour their sound as they wish.

For much greater detail on the structure and movement of the throat see Dave Liebmann's "Developing a personal sound"

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Exercise for throat relaxation:

Place your hand in front of your mouth.

Breath onto your hand imagining you are steaming up a mirror and be conscious of the sensation in your throat. It should feel relaxed and open. Think of this as vocalising "HA".

Retain this sensation as you practice breathing in and out keeping the diaphragm/abdomen firm. Does your throat start to tighten?. Move onto the saxophone and practice your tone exercises.

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Speed of air flow

The best plan for building your sound is to start with improving your louder dynamics. Our instrument gives the player mush lower air resistance than the clarinet or the oboe but a common fault among inexperienced

players is not to push a lot of air fast enough through the tube. This simple exercise gets the player to move the air at the required speed for a good loud dynamic.

Place a sheet of paper flat on a smooth wall. See how long you can pin the paper on the wall with only your breath. Also try starting with a small bit then gradually increase the size to see how large a piece you can keep there.

Remember to keep the throat relaxed and then try playing a tone on the saxophone with the same energy.

Mouthpiece practice

Practicing on the mouthpiece is one oi the best ways of developing flexibility and co-ordination.

Mastering the exercises outlined here will improve:

1. Intonation via embouchure stability and tongue/throat/larynx co-ordination Pitch bending for the vocalisations commonly used in jazz and contemporary music like portamento and vibrato
2. Harmonics - the most important and advanced sound exercises the saxophone player can master

Exercise

Take the mouthpiece off the saxophone and make a sound. Try to use the same embouchure and feel in your mouth that you habitually use when playing.

Note the pitch you play.

If:

1. Your breathing is right
2. Your tongue and throat is relaxed
3. The pressure on the mouthpiece is right

You should produce a concert "A" on the alto mouthpiece, "G" on tenor, "D" on soprano, "D" on baritone.
Most commonly the pitch is too high. It is a case of elimination of the above in this order to bring it down. This initially needs a teacher present to act a mirror to your actions.

With the tongue and throat be absolutely certain there is no tension in the throat. This is the most common cause of high pitches.

Practice different tongue positions from "ee" to "eh" to "uh" to "ah" to "aw" and all points in between to hear the differences in pitch. This should be quite pronounced and will move from a high pitch for "ee" down to "aw". . . . . .

When coupled with altering the pressure and point of contact on the reed' with the bottom lip you can get a range of an octave and a fifth below the target note. Over a number of months this should be the aim of the student.

I most commonly play with an "eh" tongue shape and I then adjust the pressure on the reed with my jaw and lower lip i.e. my embouchure to achieve the target note. This is the embouchure pressure I use for more or less EVERY NOTE ON THE SAXOPHONE no matter what the register.
DO NOT INCREASE PRESSURE ON THE LIP AS YOU GO UP THE SAXOPHONE. A good way of counteracting this tendency is to think down as you play higher, think up as you play lower.