

# Breathing / blowing games

**This leaflet is for children who have been advised to do chest physiotherapy as a treatment for their chest condition. It is aimed to help with participation in young children and toddlers to make chest physiotherapy sessions fun and help your child to learn how to clear their lungs of secretions.**

## Why do breathing games?

There are two main reasons; to encourage your child to take a bigger, deeper breath in and to learn to breathe out in different ways. This will help to move and clear secretions from their lungs and increase ventilation.

These exercises are the foundations for exercises that your child might need to do when they are older. Your physiotherapist will guide you.

## General exercise:

Once your child is able to walk, run and maintain their balance you should encourage physical activity such as jumping on a trampoline or a space hopper, running, climbing or playing wheelbarrows! Once they are old enough sporting activities should also be included as there is increasing evidence that physical activity not only improves and maintains healthy levels of fitness but helps to ventilate and clear the lungs of secretions too.

Physical exercise should be used in addition to physiotherapy and not as a replacement, as research shows that although exercise is an effective way of clearing secretions, alone it is not as good as physiotherapy techniques. It is really good if your child can do some physiotherapy exercises after general exercise.

Hydration is also very important to keep secretions from becoming too thick. It is important for them to drink regularly throughout the day, more so if they are exercising.

## Breathing games:

Below is a list of breathing games that can be performed at any time of the day. However, they can be more effective if done during their physiotherapy:

- **Blowing bubbles:** Most children enjoy bubbles, and this encourages them to take a big breath in and blow gently through an 'O'-shaped mouth. Repeat three to four 'blows', as their technique improves, encourage your child to breathe out for longer.
- **Blowing a Ping-pong ball:** From one cup of water to another.
- **Blowing onto a tissue:** Holding a tissue out in front of you ask your child to take a big breath in and blow onto the tissue to lift it up. If they are struggling, remove one or two ply-



sheets. Repeat three to four times. As this gets easier, encourage them to keep the tissue up for as long as possible and blow all the way out.

- **Cotton wool ball football with a straw:** Place a box on its side to make a 'goal'. With the cotton wool on the table, your child should take a big breath in and blow through the straw to blow the cotton wool across the 'pitch' into the goal. You can participate in the game to make it competitive. Aim for your child to take four to five big breaths in each game.



- **Alternatively, blow a ball along lines on the floor.**
- **Bubble PEP:** Your child's physiotherapist will provide the 'Bubble PEP' information sheet if appropriate.



- **Blow painting:** Place some spots of paint on a piece of paper and then ask your child to blow into a straw as close to the paint as possible. This should move the paint across the paper in different directions to make a picture. **Warning: this can get messy!**

- **Ping-pong ball hovering:** If your child can blow out through a straw for more than 4 seconds, see if they can make a small ball, such as a ping-pong ball or a polystyrene craft ball, hover above a flexed straw. Ask your child to blow through the bottom of the straw and have the top pointing up. Hold the ball above the straw and ask them to blow. Let go and see how long they can make it hover or how high they can blow it (like the 'Maltesers' game).



- **Huffing:** Using a small cardboard tube, ask your child to blow through it with their lips closed tightly around it. This is probably the hardest exercise, so make sure they are able to do the others first. Your physio can demonstrate it for you so you know how it should sound. This technique is used to squeeze their secretions up to the back of their throat so they can cough them up with less effort. If they are struggling, ask them to steam up a mirror.
- **Huffing butterflies/pterodactyl:** Once your child has mastered 'huffing' and they no longer require the tube you can try this game. Tear up a piece of tissue and twist it in the middle. Place it on a flat hand and ask your child to 'huff' to make it fly. Try this four or five times.

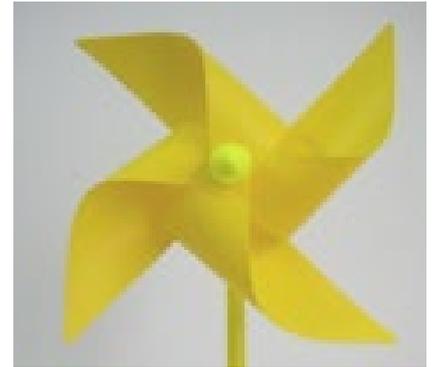
**If you are experiencing any problems with these exercises please contact your physiotherapist on the contact details below.**

### **Alternative toys that encourage deeper breaths and breathing out for longer:**

These toys can be used if your child is getting bored of the exercises on this sheet. They are not necessary if your child is active on a daily basis and doing the exercises suggested on this sheet.

- Party bag whistles and blowing toys.
- Toy recorder / harmonica.

- Bird-sounding whistle.
- Polystyrene plane with a straw.
- Paper windmill.
- Steaming up a window / mirror and drawing on it.



Blowing game toys should never be shared with other children. They should be kept in a box away from their other toys marked 'physiotherapy' so that they are only brought out to play in your sessions. This way you can make sure that they stay clean.

Some toys/equipment can only be used once, for example a straw or a tissue. Others will need to be cleaned by washing them in warm soapy water, rinse with clean water and leave to dry naturally (some toys may come with alternative cleaning instructions, please follow these guidelines).

If you struggle to get your child to do the exercises, make a box with options in and ask them to choose one or two to do with each session. This makes it more varied and fun for them.

### Useful links:

- For children with cystic fibrosis, information is available at: <https://cysticfibrosis.org.uk/>
- Blowing activities for physiotherapy and CF:  
<https://rrandj.wordpress.com/2014/10/13/blowing-activities-for-physiotherapy-and-cystic-fibrosis/>

### References:

1. Flume PA et al. 'Cystic fibrosis pulmonary guidelines: airway clearance therapies' *Respiratory Care*, 2009, 54(4): 522-537
2. Lester MK & Flume PA. 'Airway-clearance therapy guidelines and implementation.' *Respiratory Care*, 2009, 54(6): 733-750

### Useful contacts:

Dingley Specialist Children's Centre  
Erleigh House, Earley Gate  
University of Reading Whiteknights Road Campus  
Reading RG6 6BZ  
Tel: 0118 322 7531 (phone option 1)  
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**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

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