

Patient information:

Breathing control

This leaflet aims to help you re-educate your breathing by practicing breathing control techniques. If there is anything you do not understand speak to your physiotherapist, who can explain things for you.

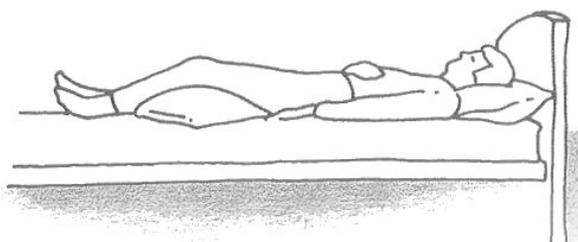
Breathing control

Many people who have breathing problems get into a habit of over-using their upper chest without realising it. By relaxing your upper chest and using your lower chest more, the effort of breathing is reduced.

Breathing control is gentle breathing using the lower chest. It is the normal pattern of breathing which you should be using most of the time and you only require 20-30% of your lung capacity whilst using this type of breathing pattern.

Position

Lie on your back fully supported with 1 or 2 pillows under head and a pillow under knees, or use a sitting position where your back is fully supported.



It is best, if possible, to breathe in through your nose, as it warms, filters and humidifies the air. Breathe out gently, through your nose (if possible).

Gently breathe in, keeping the upper chest and shoulders relaxed. Place hands on upper abdomen and try to feel a slight swelling or expansion of the lower ribs and upper abdomen as the air comes in.

It will feel like you are breathing around your waist and at first you may experience a natural feeling of discomfort as you use this type of breathing pattern.

Placing a hand or hands on the abdomen helps you to improve sensory awareness.

Closing your eyes also helps you focus on your breathing pattern without external distraction. Thinking about filling up a kettle to a third full, may be helpful. Alternatively, place a small book or box on your abdomen and watch it rise and fall with your breathing pattern.

Concentrate on the "**in breath**" and notice when and how it starts and finishes. Remember, it should only be a small breath.

Breathing **out** should be slow and passive and is longer than inspiration. Your shoulders and upper chest should be kept relaxed throughout. Concentrate again on the beginning and end of this phase.

At the end of expiration there should be a spontaneous stop or **natural rest point** in the breathing cycle before inspiration restarts. You should feel relaxed during this rest point phase and should not feel any tension.

Think of changing the pattern from a thoracic in and up movement pattern to an abdominal in and down pattern.

Use timing and counting as a way to reinforce the new pattern of breathing. Progress from **in out in out in...** to a slower more natural pattern of **in and out two three four and in and out two three...**

At first it will be very difficult to achieve this pattern of breathing without full concentration, gradually, you will begin to find it easier to master. Once you can learn to control the breathing pattern in lying and sitting, you should progress to standing, walking, whilst exercising and at times of stress and risk. Natural breathlessness will occur during exercise but continuing to use the breathing control you will recover more quickly. During this time you may need to breathe in and out through an open mouth.

Daily tasks that normally make you breathless can be made easier if you breathe rhythmically. When exercising it is sometimes easier to breathe out through the mouth – '**blow as you go**'.

- **Breathe in before you make an effort.**
- **Breathe out while making the effort.**

For example:

Breathe in before lifting a heavy bag then breathe out while you lift the bag.

Breathe in and then breathe out as you bend down.

Always try breathing out 'blow as you go' during the most difficult part of any action!

Use this technique whilst in hospital and when you go home.

Breathing control when walking

Many respiratory patients will find it easier to walk with a rollator (wheeled) frame rather than a walking frame or sticks as it enables the person to keep a good posture and use breathing control more easily.

Breathing control is helpful when you are walking up stairs and slopes, and may even be useful when walking on the level.



Try to relax the upper chest, shoulders and arms, and use the breathing control exercise. Under strain, there is often a tendency to hold your breath. This only makes things worse and increases the feeling of breathlessness.

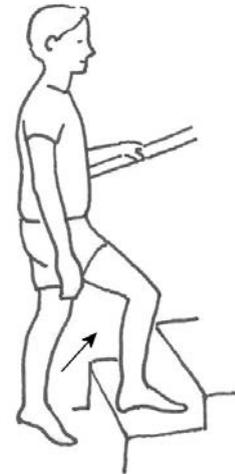
Try to breathe in time to the steps you take. For example:

- Breathe **in** for 1 step
- Breathe **out** for 1 step

or

- Breathe **in** for 1 step
- Breathe **out** for 2 steps

Find the rhythm which suits you best.



Programme for practising at home

1. Practice little and often; in a busy day you may only manage two or three 5-minute sessions.
2. However, initially three sessions of 10-15 minutes in lying are more beneficial.
3. Try starting the day with a period of conscious controlled breathing before getting up.
4. Secondly, on returning from work or shopping.
5. Thirdly, before going to sleep at night.
6. At the same time play relaxing music in the background (whatever suits you) and imagine a relaxing scene.
7. If you are very cold, lie on a warm towel – it will help you relax.
8. If you are finding it very difficult to do the exercises, use the beach position in lying.
9. When you can do 5 minutes easily in lying, try to practise more in sitting, standing and walking.
10. In between times, try a few minutes practice during the day - coffee and tea breaks, in the car waiting for the traffic lights to change, watching the TV etc.
11. Find time in your daily routine to relax. This is essential to recharge your batteries.
12. Use a small fan if you are feeling very breathless.

3 important factors for good breathing – posture, nose breathing and relaxation!

And remember, Rome was not built in a day!!

Respiratory Medicine/Physiotherapy Department, April 2006
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