

Patient information

Breathing control – functional positions

In normal breathing 70 - 80% of the work is done by the diaphragm (the main muscle of breathing which sits under the heart and lungs) and is the most energy-efficient and relaxing way to breathe.

Look at how you are breathing - is it through the nose or the mouth? Do your shoulders, arms and hands feel tense? Can you feel or see your upper chest rising or are you breathing into your belly? Can you hear yourself breathing? Do you sigh or yawn a lot?

Breathing well at rest means breathing quietly in and out through your nose, into your belly, at between 8 - 16 breaths per minute.

Benefits of nose breathing:

- Humidification
- Cleans the air
- Warms the air
- Reduce cough reflex
- Encourages air flow to the lower parts of the lungs

People with lung problems often breathe from the top of their lungs. This is an inefficient way to breathe.

Breathing into your belly indicates that you are breathing with your diaphragm, the big dome-shaped muscle underneath your lungs. As the diaphragm contracts, or works, it moves down into your abdomen, pulling air into your lungs, and pushing your belly forwards. As it relaxes back into its dome shape, the air passes out of your lungs and your belly sinks back down.

Breathing with your diaphragm ensures we use the bottom part of our lungs, which allows the body to move more oxygen in to the blood and uses less

energy per breath. It is also known as tummy breathing as this is where we see the movement.

Breathing control (tummy breathing) is simply normal breathing, using the lower chest and diaphragm, with relaxation of the upper chest and shoulders.

Practicing your ‘tummy breathing’ can help to improve the effectiveness of your breathing and strengthen your diaphragm muscle:

1. Find a comfortable, well supported position, your physiotherapist will advise you which position to start in. They will then guide you through the positions pictured below as your diaphragm strength improves.
2. Place one hand on your chest, just below your chin, and the other hand gently on your tummy just beneath your ribs - don't press too hard.
3. Make sure that your breathing is as steady and relaxed as possible - **not deep or fast breaths**. Breath in and out through your nose if possible.
4. You should feel the hand on your tummy rise as you breathe in and lower as you breathe out - these are indications that your diaphragm is working properly. The hand on your chest should stay still.
5. Ensure your neck and shoulders remain relaxed.

Mastering breathing control doesn't happen easily. It involves trying to retrain the way you breathe – often against years of habit

Breathing control video: Click on this link to see a video of the breathing control exercise:

<https://www.physiotherapyforbpd.org.uk/self-help/#videos>

Functional positions of breathing control

Position 1: Lying flat with hands behind head (beach pose)



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Position 2: Lying flat



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Position 3: Reclined long sitting



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Position 4: Long sitting



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Position 5: Supported sitting



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Position 6: Unsupported sitting



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Position 7: Supported standing



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Tips for breathing control

Do

- Try to practise for at least 10 minutes a day
- Practise in a comfortable position, keeping the shoulders relaxed
- Practise breathing control when you have some time to yourself
- Try to ensure there are no interruptions when practising
- Persevere!
- Incorporate breathing control into your daily life eg when walking, in the car, washing dishes

- Combine breathing control with positions of ease when you are breathless. Your physiotherapist will advise you of these

Don't

- Hold your breath whilst performing breathing control

Remember you are in control of your breathing!

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<https://www.accessable.co.uk>



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