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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

Author: Kate Nash
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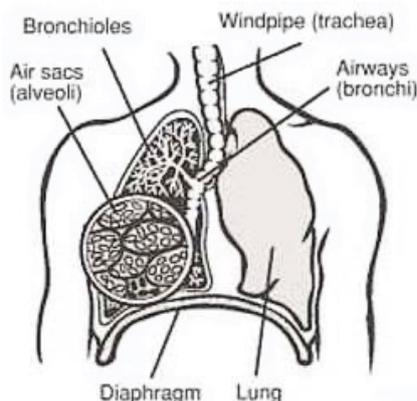
Breathing Control (page 1 of 3)

This leaflet gives you more information following your assessment by the physiotherapist.

The aim of breathing control is to help you with your breathing, to recognise how you are breathing now and how you should be breathing. The technique will help you to keep control of your breathing, firstly at rest and then during activity.

What is a normal breathing pattern?

At rest a normal breathing rate is approximately 12-16 breaths per minute. The air enters and leaves the nose in a gentle and controlled

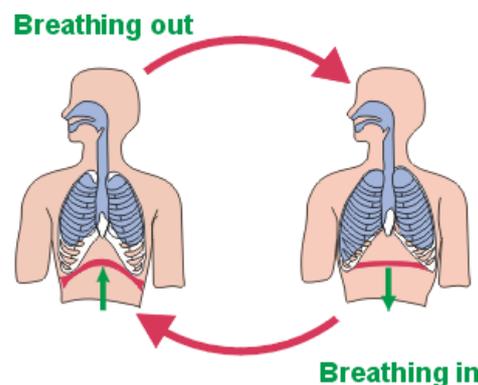


manner. The main muscle used for breathing is the diaphragm. To the left is a diagram showing the lungs, diaphragm and windpipe.

When breathing in (inspiration), the diaphragm contracts and flattens and the stomach is pushed forward and out. When breathing out (exhaling), the diaphragm relaxes and the stomach returns to its resting position. Throughout the whole of

this cycle the top part of the lungs remain still.

Inspiration creates space for the air to flow through the airways and into the lungs. The air enters the air sacs where the oxygen is transported to the body through the blood vessels. During breathing out (exhalation) the diaphragm relaxes and pushes the air out of the chest.



How do I breathe?

Lie in a comfortable position with a pillow under your head and knees. Place your hands on the top of your tummy and chest wall.

Watch and feel which of your hands move most as you breathe in and



out. This helps you to understand which part of your lungs you use the most.

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It may also be worthwhile discussing with close friends and family to see if you have habits such as frequently yawning, coughing and sighing.

During your appointment, your physiotherapist will help you to identify your normal breathing pattern and alter it. Use this leaflet together with the advice you have been given

Breathing control

- the best way of helping yourself to breathe correctly is to sit in a comfortable armchair or lie on the bed and make sure you are as relaxed as possible. Release any tension in your neck and shoulders before starting breathing exercises
- place your hands on your stomach and chest wall as shown in the diagram above. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Focus your thoughts on breathing the air towards your stomach, filling your lungs from the bottom upwards. You should feel your stomach rise under your hand. Ensure that your breath size and rate does not increase as you practise. You may find that it takes a few minutes before you are able to achieve this style of breathing. If you find this hard, try doing it whilst lying down rather than sitting
- when you feel comfortable doing this exercise, make sure that your breathes do not suddenly increase in size, for example through sighing, yawning and coughing. While you are controlling your breathing you may find that you feel hungry for air. This sensation is perfectly normal and is a result of the level of carbon dioxide increasing to a more normal level within your lungs and bloodstream. You will find that as you continue to practise controlled breathing this sensation will diminish as your brain becomes used to a new, higher, level of carbon dioxide
- it is worthwhile practising controlled breathing for a few minutes, at least 6 - 8 times a day. Although it may sound difficult to include this during the day, try fitting it in with your normal activities. For example after eating lunch, sit down in a quiet area or during advert breaks whilst watching TV. Additionally, it is important that as soon as your symptoms start, to concentrate on your breathing pattern and try out the exercises you have been practising. This should help with some of your symptoms
- as your technique of breathing control improves and you feel confident, you can add a pause at the end of each breath. Hold your breath out for a couple of seconds, before breathing back in, making sure your pattern of breathing remains smooth and calm.

Breathing and exercise

As your breathing control improves, do the exercise while standing up. Check your pattern of breathing while you are walking. Try to maintain nose breathing with slow regular diaphragmatic breaths. If you find this difficult you may benefit from counting your steps as you breathe in and out. For example, breathing in for 2 steps and out for 3 steps. You may want to try a different ratio of steps to breaths in and out, but check to find what works for you. Additionally you may want to keep a hand on your tummy to encourage you to breathe diaphragmatically.

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If you exercise strenuously it is normal that your upper chest and other muscles are used whilst breathing in. However your diaphragm should always be used first before the upper chest comes into use.

Breathing and speech

Often people who breathe using their upper chest do not breathe enough whilst speaking. As a result their sentences become very long with small snatched breaths using the top of their lungs. Check your style of breathing whilst you are speaking. Try to maintain a smooth, slow speech pattern. Breathe at regular stages. Practise reading aloud, using punctuation to help you control your breathing.

If you struggle with this way of breathing whilst you are talking, your physiotherapist can practise this with you, and provide speech sheets for you to practise with.

Breathing and eating

Sometimes people who breathe using their upper chest eat very quickly without breathing properly. Check your breathing style whilst you eat. Make sure that you are breathing quietly through your nose, using your diaphragm. Your food should be chewed slowly. It is useful to allow yourself to sit comfortably during and after eating. After eating, blood is sent to the digestive organs to assist with absorption of the food. Consequently if you are active during and after eating, you cannot digest your food properly.

For more information please contact:

- The respiratory department physiotherapist who gave you this leaflet. They can be contacted on 01722 429220.

