

Guide to good breathing

Information for patients

What is 'good breathing'?

'Good breathing' means moving air in and out of the lungs with the minimum of effort and using the right muscles.

Breathing dynamics

The most important muscle used in breathing is the **Diaphragm or breathing muscle**.

As you breathe in, the breathing muscle moves downwards, drawing air into your lungs. At the same time, the pelvic floor muscles should move downwards and your abdominals and spinal muscles should move outwards to allow the lungs to fill.

As you breathe out, the breathing muscle moves upwards, expelling the air from your lungs. At the same time, the pelvic floor should move upwards and your abdominal and spinal muscles should move inwards.



Should I breathe through my nose or my mouth?

It is very important that you breathe in and out through your nose to allow the air to be filtered, warmed and moistened. It is ok to breathe through your mouth when you are exercising.

Prepare for breathing exercise:

1. Posture – you can carry out these exercises, in lying, sitting or standing. Ensure you are comfortable, imagine a string gently pulling you upwards from the crown of your head, this avoids slouching and bending your neck forwards.
2. Make sure your lips are closed but avoid clenching your jaw. There should be a space between your frontal teeth.
3. Ensure that your tongue position is on the roof of your mouth - without touching the back of the teeth.

Diaphragmatic breathing technique

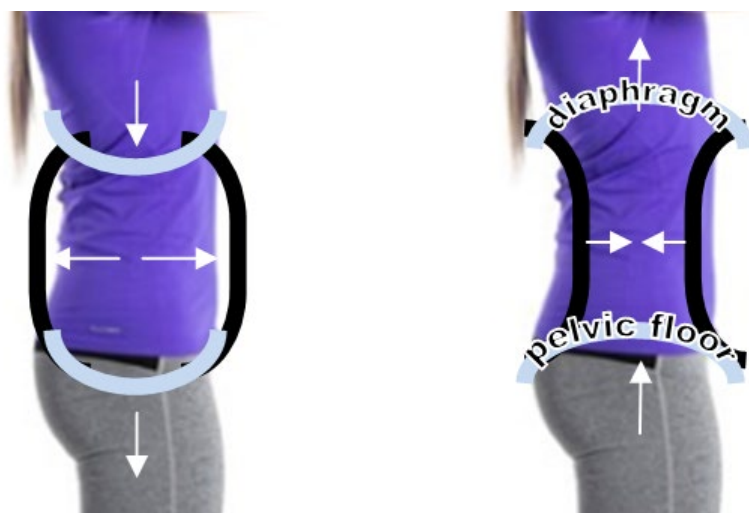
1. Breathe in gently in through your nose (imagine you are sipping air in), directing air to the bottom of your lungs. This should be unforced and silent.
2. Breathe out lightly through your nose if possible without pushing and with your abdominals (tummy) relaxed.
3. Make sure you relax and pause at the end of each breath.
4. When you breathe in, your upper chest should be relaxed and not moving. From time to time, you can place your hand on your upper chest to check this.

Breathing and pelvic floor

Mastering the correct breathing technique can be beneficial for improving pelvic floor function.

During the breathing exercise, try to feel what your pelvic floor muscles (PFM) are doing, you should feel PFM relaxing when you breathe in and lifting slightly when you breathe out.

If you feel comfortable, as you breathe out, squeeze the pelvic floor muscles, and then allow the muscles to relax when you breathe in. Make sure you relax and pause at the end of each breath. The aim of this exercise is not to increase the strength of the pelvic floor muscles, rather improve the range of motion of these muscles.



Tips and hints

- If you notice that your upper chest is moving throughout the exercise, you could try placing your hands behind your neck.
- Place one hand on your upper chest and the other hand on your upper tummy, you should feel the hand on your upper tummy rising and the hand on your upper chest should remain still.
- Notice how you breathe when you are relaxed. Many people mainly breathe through their mouth, therefore, adjusting to nose breathing may take time and it is important to practice breathing in and out through nose only.
- Aim to practice this exercise regularly throughout the day.

For further help and advice:

NHS Lothian Urology Physiotherapy website:

<https://services.nhsllothian.scot/urologyphysiotherapy/>

