

Recommended Reading:

Hyperventilation Syndrome

By Dinah Bradley

Published by Tandem Press

Hyperventilation Syndrome (updated version: 2012)

By Dinah Bradley

Published by Kyle Books

Hyperventilation Syndrome/Breathing pattern disorders and how to overcome them

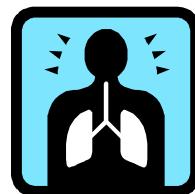
By Dinah Bradley & Dr Mike Thomas

Published by Kyle Books

Dynamic breathing and how to manage your asthma

By Dinah Bradley & Tania Clifton-Smith

Published by Random House New Zealand Ltd



If you have any queries or concerns, please speak with your physiotherapist:

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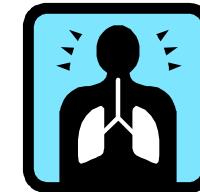
Created by N Barrett March 03.

Reviewed by Sarah Mooney August 2004, 2011, 2012, 2013

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DISORDERED BREATHING

Understanding the signs, symptoms and management



WHAT IS DISORDERED BREATHING?

- It means breathing more than the body needs.
- This can be called ‘over-breathing’ or ‘hyperventilation’.
- Long term it can lead to many unpleasant and sometimes severe symptoms.

IS IT NORMAL?

Yes:

- Short term over-breathing is a normal reaction to strong emotions or stressful events.
- Many people experience over-breathing at some point in their life but usually the normal breathing pattern returns after the event.
- If over-breathing or stressful events are happening everyday, over-breathing can become a habit.

HOW AM I OVER - BREATHING?

You may not be aware that your breathing is wrong, but you can become aware of some signs and symptoms:

- Breathing from the upper chest
- Breathing fast and shallow
- Frequent yawning or sighing
- Difficulty breathing and talking

MANAGEMENT:

- **Sudden attack:**

If you experience an ‘acute’ attack follow this plan:

- **STOP**
- **DROP**
- **FLOP**



- This means **STOP** what you are doing, **DROP** or rather sit down somewhere and then **FLOP** i.e. relax/rest your muscles, especially around your shoulder area
- Concentrate on your breath out. Aim to make each breath out twice as long as your breath in.
- Try slowing your breathing rate, making your breathing quiet; counting often helps here for example: “breathe in ... and out, one, two”
- Keep reassuring yourself that all the symptoms you are experiencing will feel better once your breathing has settled.

Daily management

- Quick, regular checks of your breathing throughout the day are helpful and should include:

1. Are you breathing from your lower chest?
2. Are you breathing slowly and smoothly?
3. Are your muscles rested/relaxed especially around the shoulder/neck area?
4. Are you talking slowly?

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

Once you have been assessed by a physiotherapist:

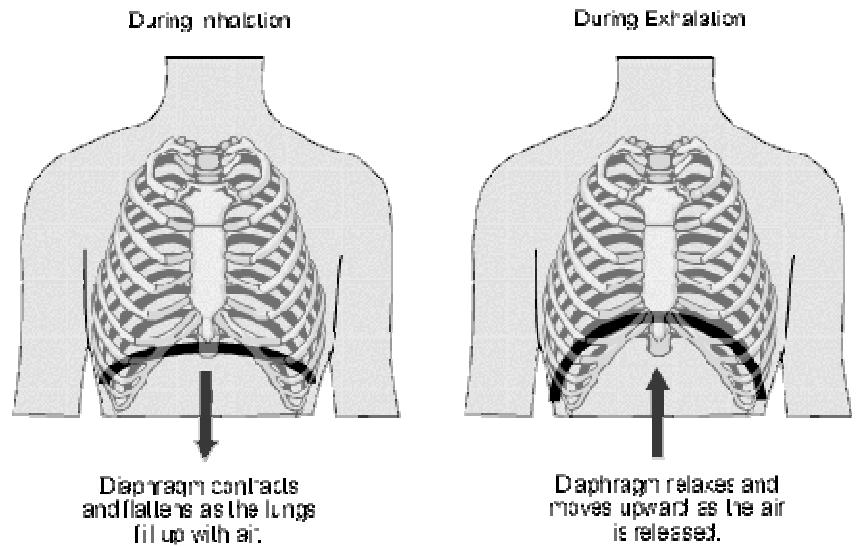
Be patient:

- Retraining your breathing pattern takes time, work at it slowly.
- Remember, even if you do not manage to completely correct your breathing pattern, understanding the problem will help. You can feel less anxious about the symptoms and more in control.
- Relaxation exercises can be helpful. Avoid techniques that involve deep breaths or tensing the muscles.
- Total body relaxation whilst practising your ‘tummy’ breathing is excellent for your body.
- Try and reduce the stress in your life and make sure you regularly do things that you enjoy.
- A regular sleep pattern and good diet are also important

Exercise:

- Exercise is important. Walking is ideal. Be aware of your breathing when walking and with the advice of your physiotherapist, practice your ‘tummy’ breathing as you walk. Your physiotherapist will also advise you on other forms of exercise and when/how to combine with breathing exercises.

WHAT IS GOOD AND ‘NOT GOOD’ BREATHING?



Normal breathing:

- As we breathe in, the diaphragm (main breathing muscle) is pulled down which pushes your tummy area out. When we breathe out, the diaphragm slowly rises back up, often taking twice as long as the breath in (see picture above)
- Normally we breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide with little effort and using the right muscles. When we breathe well at rest, breathing should be calm, regular and easy.

‘Not good’ breathing

- When we over breathe, we blow off too much carbon dioxide. This can irritate muscles and nerves and result in many unpleasant and frightening symptoms such as those listed on the next page.
- Everyone is different and the symptoms are unique to each person.

COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DISORDERED BREATHING

Area	Signs & symptoms
Breathing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortness of breath • Tightness in chest • Suffocation feeling/ air hunger • Sighing/yawning
Nerves and muscles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tightness of hand muscles • Tremors • Tightness around the mouth or chest • Cramps • Pins and needles
Brain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dizziness • Fainting • Headaches • Confusion
Heart and circulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Palpitations • Chest pain • Cold hands & feet
Abdomen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nausea • Upper abdominal pain • Indigestion, wind ‘irritable bowel’ • Bloated feeling in stomach
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue • Difficulty sleeping • Poor concentration
Psychological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Nervousness • Restlessness

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?

Once you have been assessed by a physiotherapist, you will be shown some simple exercises and progressed through different positions. These exercises will help your muscles ‘re-learn’ how to move better and breathe more easily.

Exercises:

- To start, lie on your back and make yourself comfortable.
- Aim to breathe in and out through your nose.
- Practise breathing down to your tummy or ‘tummy breathing’, with little movement in the upper chest. You may need to put your arms behind your head first to make it easier or a light beanbag/weight on your tummy. Do not force your tummy out.
- Take a breath in through your nose, feeling your tummy rise, rest/relax and breathe out feeling your tummy fall flat. Do not force your tummy out.
- Think of the pattern of breathing – ‘breathe, in … and, out, one, two’ Brief pause and repeat.
- Do not be in a rush to take your next breath. You may feel like sighing or yawning, try to stop yourself.

Practice:

- You will find that as your body re-learns how to breathe correctly, it will become easier to practice and breathing is more restful/relaxing
- You will need to practice as often as you can. Try building up from a few minutes to longer.
- Progress to other positions as practised with the physiotherapist, such as sitting and standing once you can manage ‘tummy breathing’ easily lying down.