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Lung Problems: Learning to Breathe Easier

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Overview

Breathing is hard when you have lung problems like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or interstitial lung disease. You may take quick, short breaths. Breathing this way makes it harder to get air into your lungs. Learning new ways to slow down and control your breathing may help. You may feel better and be able to do more because you can breathe better.

You can try two ways to control your breathing. They are pursed-lip breathing and diaphragmatic breathing.

Use these methods when you are more short of breath than normal. Practice them often so you can use them correctly when you need to.

How do you use these breathing methods?

Pursed-lip breathing

Pursed-lip breathing (See figure 1 in appendix) helps you breathe more air out so that your next breath can be deeper. It makes you less short of breath and lets you be more active.

1. Bend forward slightly at the waist. Keep your back straight.
Breathing while bending forward at the waist may make it easier for you to breathe.

You can sit or stand to use this breathing method. If you are standing, you may want to rest your hands on the edge of a table or the back of a chair.

2. Breathe in slowly through your nose, with your mouth closed.
Breathe in for about 2 seconds.
3. Pucker your lips like you would to blow out a candle. Then breathe out slowly through your lips.
Breathe out for 4 to 6 seconds.

Use this method when you are more short of breath than normal. Practice it often so you can do it well.

Belly breathing

Breathing with your diaphragm helps your lungs expand so that they take in more air. Your diaphragm is the large muscle that separates your lungs from your belly. It helps draw air into your lungs as you breathe.

This method may be called belly breathing.

Practice this breathing method for 20 minutes at a time, 2 or 3 times a day.

1. Lie on your back, or prop yourself up on several pillows.
2. Put one hand on your belly and the other on your chest.
3. When you breathe in, push your belly out as far as possible.
You should feel the hand on your belly move out, while the hand on your chest does not move.
4. When you breathe out, you should feel the hand on your belly move in.

When you can do this type of breathing well while lying down, learn to do it while sitting or standing.

Credits

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Appendix

Topic Images

Figure 1

Pursed-Lip Breathing and Breathing While Bending Forward



Breathing while bending forward can help you breathe more easily while you are exercising or resting. Lean forward at the waist, and keep your back straight. People often use a table or the back of a chair for this. You can also use this breathing method while you are sitting down.

Pursed-lip breathing helps you breathe more air out so that your next breath can be deeper. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth while almost closing your lips. Breathe in for about 2 seconds, and breathe out for 4 to 6 seconds.

Note: The "printer friendly" document will not contain all the information available in the online document. Some information (e.g. cross-references to other topics, definitions or medical illustrations) is only available in the online version.



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