

Breathe Right! – Part II

Breathe Correctly, Consciously and Relaxed

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Note: This is not intended as medical advice, but the explanation of techniques for improved breathing control with COPD. Always check with your doctor before starting any new techniques or exercises. It is best to learn these techniques under the guidance of a Respiratory Therapist or Physical Therapist in a pulmonary rehabilitation or other clinical setting.

- **Signs of Regular and Relaxed Breathing**
- **Correct Process of Breathing**
- **Check and Improve Your Own Breathing**
- **Form the Habit of Conscious Breathing**

Chronic mental and emotional stress or a medical/structural problem can create tension in the muscles and nerves in the entire body, including the muscles of respiration. When you are physically, mentally and emotionally relaxed, your breathing is naturally slow, deep and relaxed. You can change your breathing if it is tense or incorrect by putting yourself in a state of relaxation and practicing relaxed breathing.

Signs of regular and relaxed breathing

- Neck and shoulders relaxed
- Abdominal (belly) breathing
- Slow breathing

- Smooth and rhythmical breathing
- Quiet breathing
- No long pauses or jerks between breaths
- Exhalation is equal to, or longer than, inhalation

Helpful Tips

- Practice relaxed breathing several times a day for a few minutes at a time
- Schedule several one minute “relaxed breathing moments” during the day
- Learn physical and mental relaxation techniques which will also facilitate relaxed breathing

Correct Process of Breathing

During Inhalation

Neck and shoulders remain relaxed. As the breath goes downward, the chest expands, the rib cage elevates, diaphragm goes down and the belly comes out. The area between sternum, navel and perineum feels stretched. The upper back widens and the lumbar arch slightly deepens.

During Exhalation

Neck and shoulders remain relaxed. Diaphragm relaxes, chest and ribcage retract to their pre-inhalation size and position, the belly goes in, navel slightly pulled in towards the back and the lumbar arch in the low back slightly flattens.

Check and Improve Your Own Breathing

Use the “Hand Technique”

Sit in a quiet place and just settle down for a minute or two. Put your hand, horizontally, about one inch above your navel. Close your eyes. Breathe normally without trying to influence your breathing one way or the other. Observe how your belly moves every time you breathe in and breathe out. If you are breathing correctly, you should find that the hand over the tummy moves out as you breathe in and moves in as you breathe out. This is called “abdominal breathing” (or “belly breathing”). Abdominal breathing is good but don’t deliberately puff your belly out. Let the belly be relaxed as you inhale.

If your upper chest and/or shoulders and neck go up and down as you breathe in and out, let your neck and shoulders relax. When you are sitting quietly and breathing, your neck and shoulders remain still if you are breathing correctly.

Close your eyes again and track your hand on the belly.

Belly should bulge OUT when you breathe IN.

Belly should pull IN when you breathe OUT.

Tips for correcting abdominal movement

If the abdomen does not move correctly (abdomen moves in when you inhale) you need to correct it. Here is how:

Take a slow, deep breath in and breathe out slowly and steadily. The next breath will come in automatically, that is, without your effort. Your belly will move outward as you breathe in and move inward as you breathe out.

If your abdomen begins to move incorrectly or not move at all, or

only your chest moves but not abdomen, relax and reestablish correct breathing. Take a deep, slow, easy breath and blow it out, slowly and steadily. Do it as many times as you need to. Abdomen will begin to move correctly with a few repetitions unless there is a structural problem.

Form the Habit of Conscious Breathing

As you begin to pay steady attention to your breathing, it will be easier for you to monitor your breathing. Anytime you find yourself holding your breath or having a jerky breath, breathing irregular or faster, go back to belly breathing.

Pay attention to your breathing. While inhaling, move your attention downward and follow the lungs filling, chest expanding and the belly bulging out. While exhaling, move your attention upward from abdomen to chest, notice the belly and solar plexus slightly contracting and the breath finally exiting through the nostrils. Make it a habit to breathe consciously. Conscious breathing can be very beneficial. Develop positive and relaxed awareness of your breathing.

Here is an example of conscious driving to make a point about conscious breathing. While driving, even when you use cruise control, you continue to monitor the road all the time. Likewise, you should monitor your breathing even when you get into the automatic mode of breathing. When you monitor the breath, you can decide when you want to leave your breathing on the "automatic pilot" and when to take charge and regulate your breath with awareness.

You may review more techniques on www.mindpub.com and more of Dr. Sharma's articles on breathing and Yoga for COPD at www.breathingbetterlivingwell.com/articles.php.