

Department of Speech and Language Therapy

Breathing exercises

A good pattern of breathing is needed to produce an effective voice. This involves using the diaphragm, a sheet of muscle found at the bottom of the ribcage and allowing the lungs to expand fully.

These exercises will help you improve your breathing technique.

- Ensure you are as relaxed as possible before starting your breathing exercises.
 - Always take your breathing exercises gently, pausing in between sections. If you start to feel dizzy, rest for a minute or two and then try again.
 - Allow yourself enough time to complete the exercises so you do not rush through them.
1. Lying on the floor or bed, or sitting well supported in a chair, rest your hand on your stomach/diaphragm (the area just above your waist) and be aware of the gentle inwards and outwards movement as you breathe.
- a) If seated you can use a mirror to monitor the movement and give yourself feedback. If lying down place a light book on your stomach to give you more feedback on where the breath is coming from.
 - b) Gradually exaggerate the 'out' breath. Squeeze the air out, using your stomach muscles, and then let the air naturally fill the lungs again as you breathe back in. Monitor the movement of your stomach/diaphragm as you do this – with the out breath your stomach/diaphragm moves inwards, as your breath in the area moves out and expands.
 - c) Use your hands to monitor the range of movement in your lower back as well as your stomach. Make sure there is only minimal movement in your upper chest and shoulders.
 - d) As you become more used to this breathing pattern, take deeper breaths. You should feel the lungs filling more and more and then emptying completely.

2. Sit in a relaxed but upright position, with your back supported.
 - a) Relax your shoulders.
 - b) Rest your arms on the arms of the chair or by your side (ensure they are not held tightly against your ribcage).
 - c) Breathe in a relaxed and even pattern, using small breaths only.
 - d) Next, breathe in slowly for three seconds, pause briefly and then breathe out for three seconds. During these movements feel the bottom of your ribcage and stomach move out as you breath in, and then move back in again as you breath out.
 - e) Return to your natural breathing pattern and relax.
 - f) Repeat this exercise four times, always breathing in for three seconds, pausing, and then breathing out for three seconds, and returning to your natural breathing in between.

Once you have established the correct pattern of breathing through the exercises above you can move on to the following exercises which focus on controlling the breath.

3. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, gently and easily, until a smooth and relaxed rhythm has been established.
 - a) Begin a silent count, breathing in for three seconds and out for three seconds.
 - b) Maintain this silent count for several attempts and then begin to vary the length of the 'in' and 'out' breaths.
 - c) Then try and vary this –breathing in for a count of two and out for a count of four.
4. As this becomes easier, decrease the 'in' breath time and increase the 'out' breathe time as this more closely mirrors our pattern of breathing for speech.
 - a) Breathe in on a count of two and out on a count of five.
 - b) Next breathe in on a count of two again but then breathe out on 'sssss' (hissing sound) for a count of five.
5. Make sure that you do not allow any tension to occur in your lips, tongue, throat or neck whilst making the 's' sound. If you do feel tension building up go back to silent breathing and then try again once you have relaxed.
 - a) Breathe in for a count of two and out for as long as you can on 'sssss'.
 - b) Keep a note of this time and try to extend it. Do not force the sound out, and stop if you feel any tension.
6. Now we are going to use our breath control to vary the intensity of sound.
 - a) Begin again by breathing in for a count of two and breathing out on 's'; but this time pull in your stomach muscles to make the sound grow in volume for example sssssSSSSSSS.

- b) Repeat this exercise but let the sound decrease as time goes on for example SSSSSsssss.
- c) Repeat again and this time have the period of greatest intensity/volume in the middle of your out breath for example sssSSSSsss.
- d) Finally try to alternate between periods of greater and lesser intensity (loud and soft sounds) for example sSsSsSsS.

7. Repeat the exercises (4-6) above using the sounds 'sh' and 'f' instead of 's'.



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Document history

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