

A Guide to Breathing Pattern Disorders

Why do we develop a Breathing Pattern Disorder (BPD)?

We can feel breathless for many reasons such as respiratory conditions such as Asthma, COPD, some cardiac problems and metabolic conditions including Anaemia, Diabetes and kidney issues. However, sometimes there is little or no evidence of the condition being the main reason for feeling short of breath, this is often described as 'unexplained breathlessness'.

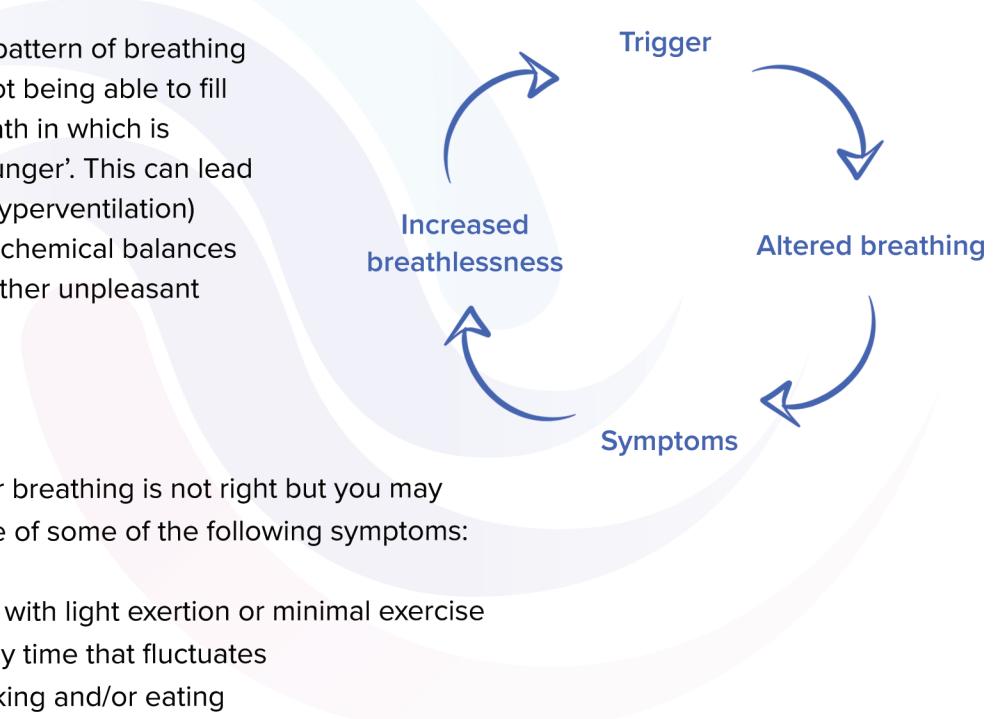
Sometimes the breathlessness is caused by the 'way' we breathe which is described as a Breathing Pattern Disorder. For some this lack of an obvious cause and diagnosis can be frustrating which can make things worse. There are many reasons why we develop unhelpful patterns; examples are an underlying lung condition, pain, sinus problems and pregnancy being a few physical causes, while stress and anxiety can also be a trigger to change the way we breathe.

When we develop an altered pattern of breathing it can lead to a sensation of not being able to fill your lungs or get enough breath in which is described as a sense of 'air hunger'. This can lead to over-breathing (known as hyperventilation) which then alters some of the chemical balances in our body, which leads to further unpleasant symptoms.

Typical symptoms of BPD

You may be unaware that your breathing is not right but you may have experienced or be aware of some of the following symptoms:

- Feeling breathless at rest or with light exertion or minimal exercise
- Feelings of 'air hunger' at any time that fluctuates
- Feeling breathless when talking and/or eating
- Frequent sighing and yawning
- Palpitations & chest discomfort
- Pins and needles in your hands or arms or around your mouth
- Light headedness/dizziness
- Feeling bloated
- Throat symptoms
- Aching and tightness in the muscles around the jaw, neck and shoulders
- Feeling permanently exhausted and unable to concentrate for no apparent reason
- Dry Cough or constant throat clearing
- Be aware of the way you breathe, practice optimal breathing little and often



Understanding how you breathe

The first step is to become aware of the 'way' you breathe. Optimal breathing in a supported sitting position, should be in and out through the nose, quiet and regular, roughly 10-16 breaths per minute, there should be little movement at the top of your chest and you should be able to see or feel your upper tummy rise up as you breathe in and sink back down as you breathe out, this out breath should not be forced.

Take a look at our 'Guide to Optimal Breathing' and the 'How to assess your breathing' video at this website www.physiotherapyforbpd.org.uk

How can I help myself?

- Understand the causes of your breathing pattern disorder, recognise triggers, such as stress, that can aggravate your symptoms, and trying to minimize them if you can.
- Becoming aware of your breathing, checking & correcting it frequently throughout the day, this will help to change your breathing pattern and help it to eventually become automatic.
- Remember your breathing will change according to your activity level. Check the Optimal breathing during movement & exercise information sheet at the website: www.physiotherapyforbpd.org.uk
- Try to maintain a good posture and learn to relax your jaw, neck and shoulders
- Cool air with a hand-held fan under your nose can reduce the sensation of breathlessness.

When resting:

- Breathe in and out through your nose
- Keep breathing quiet
- Keep breathing regular and between 10-16 breathes per minute
- **Resist** taking big breaths, sighing, yawning or clearing your throat and coughing

When talking

- Breathe in through your nose-speak slowly as you breathe out
- Keep your upper chest relaxed
Use punctuation marks to tell you when to breathe in through your nose
- Keep your sentences short to maintain control
- Resist taking a big breath in

When exercising or exerting yourself e.g. climbing stairs or walking

- Maintain nose breathing for as long as able, if you open your mouth, try not to upper chest gasp.
- Maintain lower chest breathing; imagine breathing into the sides of your lower ribs
- Keep your upper chest, jaw, neck and shoulders relaxed for as long as possible

Quick Summary:

- Aim to maintain nose breathing for as long as you are able
- Know your personal breathing triggers
- Be aware of the way you breathe, practice optimal breathing little and often
- Be patient it can take weeks to months to change your breathing.