

# YOUR Guide to

# Breathing Pattern Disorders

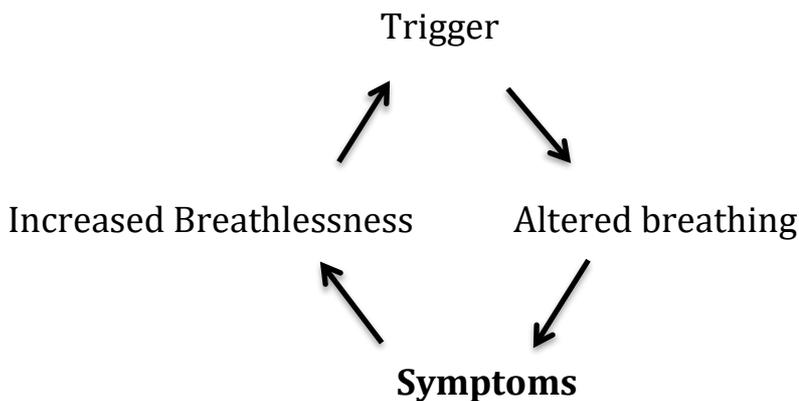


## Why do we develop a breathing pattern disorder?

There are many reasons why we feel breathless, it may be due to conditions such as COPD, asthma, heart problems or anaemia but sometimes there is no evidence of disease being responsible. The lack of a diagnosis can be frustrating to some and this frustration can make things worse.

When we develop bad patterns of breathing it may lead to a continuous sensation of not being able to fill your lungs or get enough breath or the feeling of a lack of oxygen, sometimes described as air hunger.

There are many reasons why we develop unhelpful patterns; pneumonia, pain, sinus problems and pregnancy being a few physical causes, while stress and anxiety can also be a trigger to 'altered breathing'. If we over-breathe (known as hyperventilation) we alter some of the chemical balances in our body, which it is believed may lead to some very unpleasant symptoms



## Symptoms

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

- Feeling breathless after only slight exertion or minimal exercise
- Feelings of 'air hunger'
- Feeling breathless when talking and/or eating
- Frequent sighing and yawning
- Palpitations
- 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
- Chest discomfort

## How can therapy help?

Once a poor pattern becomes a habit it is difficult to alter but a specialist therapist will be able to help you. To decide whether you may need some help in regaining control of your breathing have a look at how you breathe. 'Normal' breathing 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 movement should not be forced.

## How can I help myself?

Understand the causes of your dysfunctional breathing pattern.

Learn to recognise any triggers, such as stress, that can aggravate your symptoms, and try to reduce these. You will need to practice the exercises regularly at the beginning, becoming aware of your breathing and checking it frequently throughout the day, will help to change your breathing pattern and help it to eventually become automatic.

## Top tips for controlling your breathing

Remember your breathing will change according to your activity level

Try to maintain a good posture and learn to relax your jaw, neck and shoulders

### 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

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

Its ok to open your mouth, try not to upper chest gasp.

## Other tips

Cool air with a hand-held fan under your nose can reduce the sensation of breathlessness.

It can take weeks to months for some people to eventually change their breathing as it may have become habitual for you. Do not worry, this is normal. You need to allow yourself time and be patient.

## Links and Further Information

[www.physiotherapyforbpd.org](http://www.physiotherapyforbpd.org) – you can find videos of how to breathe

[www.buteykobreathing.org](http://www.buteykobreathing.org) breathing retraining for people with Asthma