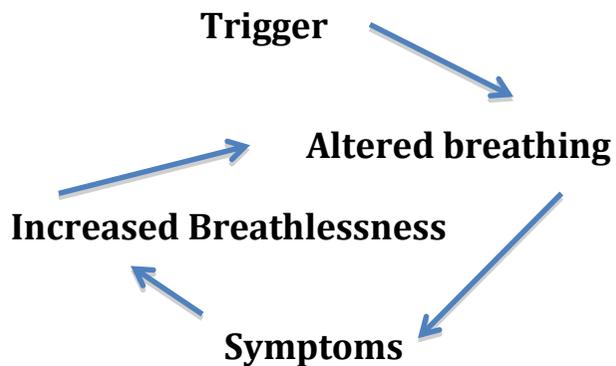


Why do we develop a breathing pattern disorder?

There are many reasons why we feel breathless, it may be due to conditions such as COPD and asthma, heart problem, or because you are anaemic, 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
- Throat clearing
- Chest pain

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. You may find you need a specialist therapist to help you: find details of physiotherapists treating people with breathing pattern problems at

<https://www.physiotherapyforbpd.org.uk/find-a-physio/>

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

At all times:

Maintain good posture

Learn to relax 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

Keep your upper chest, jaw, neck and shoulders relaxed for as long as possible

Try breathing rhythmically- match your breaths in and out to your steps – find a rhythm that suits you. e.g. breathe in for one step and out for 2 steps, try to have more steps for breathing out than for breathing in .

Gradually increase your aerobic activity (those that make you breathless) to increase your fitness.

Resist taking in big breaths.

Remember you should be able to walk and talk

Other tips

Many people find using a small fan in front of the face to create movement of air is helpful in taking away the feeling of breathlessness.

Once a poor pattern becomes a habit it can be difficult to alter it. Become aware of your breathing and check it frequently to help to change your habitual breathing pattern to the 'normal' breathing pattern. You will need to practice regularly to help the 'normal' breathing pattern to become automatic and natural without the need to constantly correct it.

It can take weeks to months for some people to eventually change their breathing. Don't worry, this is normal. You need to allow yourself time and be patient with yourself

Links and Further Information

Physiotherapy for Breathing Pattern Disorders

www.physiotherapyforbpd.org

for helpful videos to explain what a normal breathing pattern should look like and guidance on how to try to assess and correct

Buteyko Breathing Association

www.buteykobreathing.org



Breathing Pattern Disorders

Also known as
Dysfunctional breathing

Causes, Effects and self-
management advice