

Exercises for improving breath support



These exercises teach you to use your lungs more effectively when you speak. Upper chest breathing for speech can increase tension and strain your voice. You can learn to use your diaphragm and abdomen (stomach muscles) to help you breathe better when talking. This is called abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing.

During abdominal breathing, your abdomen moves in towards your spine when breathing outward. When breathing in, your abdomen is relaxed and released. Your upper chest and body should be relaxed and your shoulders should not rise as you breathe. This helps reduce tension in your shoulders, neck and vocal tract and is a natural and efficient way of speaking.

How can you improve your breathing?

- Keep your posture straight, relaxed and comfortable either sitting or standing.
- It is helpful to do these exercises in front of a mirror.
- Keep your tongue, jaw and throat relaxed.
- Focus on breathing out rather than in.
- Breathe enough air into your lungs to start speaking – you shouldn't need to take a deep breath.
- Stop breathing exercises if you feel light-headed or dizzy.

Exercises

1. Lie down and put your hands on your stomach. Breathe out and in and feel your hand rise and fall. This will make you aware of your breathing.
2. Sit or stand and place one hand gently on your stomach.
 - a. Imagine you are blowing up a balloon. Clench your fist and blow into the narrow opening. Feel the abdominal muscles engage, move inwards and your stomach flatten when you breathe out.
 - b. When you have run out of air, relax your abdominal muscles and breathe in, letting the air flow naturally back into your lungs. Feel your abdomen rise.

Remain sitting or standing and try these exercises:

1. Imagine you are blowing out 3 birthday candles. Each time, blow the air out pushing from the abdomen (your shoulders should be relaxed and still). Before you move on to the next candle, relax your abdomen to allow the air back into your lungs. Do this until you get to 3.



2. Take a breath in and blow out to a silent count of 5. Remember to use your abdomen, not your shoulders!
3. Now try to sustain a long "ssss" sound as you breathe out. Use your abdominal breathing in the same way as above.
4. Now try to produce short bursts of "ssss", "ssss", "ssss", "ssss". This will help you learn to control your abdominal breathing.
5. On a long "ssssssssssssssss", start quietly and get louder. You will need more power from your abdomen as you increase the volume.
6. Try alternating between quiet and loud "ssss", "SSSS", "ssss", "SSSS".

You should not feel any strain in your throat doing these exercises. You are now ready to start using your voice.

7. Repeat the same exercises with a "zzzz" sound. This is exactly the same as "ssss" but you are now using your voice (vocal cords are vibrating). Remember to keep your neck and shoulders relaxed and use the power from your breath.
8. Try making a smooth transition from "ssssssss" to "zzzzzzzz". Keep this as smooth and as gentle as you can.
9. Count out loud from 1 to 5, using your abdominal breathing. Feel your abdomen fall as you are counting and rise again. When you have finished counting, relax. Now count from 1 to 10. Keep going if you can.
10. Now try saying the days of the week and the months of the year using your abdominal breathing.

Once you are confident with abdominal breathing try doing it when reading aloud and then while speaking in conversation.

Remember

You won't be able to change your breathing pattern overnight. Your breathing may go back to upper chest breathing whenever you are tense, stressed, tired and even when you are cold. Think about your breathing at different times during the day such as when driving, shopping, working and exercising. This will help you get used to it in different situations.

If you are having difficulties, go back to the first exercise of blowing through your clenched fist. This will remind you of which muscles to use when breathing. If the exercises become confusing, don't do any more and ask your speech pathologist at your next appointment.

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