



## **Breathing Exercises**

Because of the impact that COVID-19 has on lung function and the effects of being on ventilation, breathing muscles can get weaker. It's also very scary to feel like you aren't breathing well, and that can make you less likely to get back to your normal routine and do more physical activity. These exercises can help.

*Note: If you have pain with deep breathing that does not resolve with stretches and exercise, please contact your medical provider.*

### **Stacked Breathing**

Stacked breathing is useful for people with weakness of their breathing muscles and to help clear the lungs. It can improve your voice strength and keep your lungs and chest wall flexible.

Wear loose clothing that doesn't restrict you. Put your hands on your belly. Keep your shoulders relaxed. Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose and hold it, trapping the air in. Take another breath in through the nose, "stacking" it over the first. Take another little breath in. Hold it, hold it... keep holding it!

Now let all the air out from your mouth with a loud shushing sound. And relax. Repeat.

### **Pursed Lip Breathing**

Pursed lip breathing useful for people experiencing shortness of breath, particularly during exercise or increased activity. It helps open the airways longer, getting more oxygen into your lungs, and can make breathing easier. It can be done lying down, sitting or standing.

Relax the neck and shoulders. Breathe in slowly through your nose, keeping your mouth closed. With pursed lips, like if you were going to whistle or blow out a candle, exhale through the mouth slowly and gently. Try to breath out for longer than you inhaled. For example, if you inhale for two seconds, exhale through the mouth for four seconds.

You can repeat this as many times as needed until you feel your breath return to normal, and adjust the length of your inhale and exhale to make it work for you, making sure the exhale is always longer than the inhale, and always through pursed lips.



## COVID PHYSICAL THERAPY

### **Belly Breaths**

*Stress and illness can change the way we breathe. It is helpful to get into the habit of noticing where your breath is in your body regularly throughout the day and trying to consciously change that if needed. Belly breaths help decrease the amount of effort we use to get air in the body, they also activate a part of our nervous system that helps calm the body down. They can be particularly useful to do before bed if you are struggling to get to sleep. If you hear your belly gurgling, this is a good sign you're doing it correctly, since these breaths act like an abdominal massage, promoting better digestion and elimination, among their many other benefits.*

Lying on your back, sitting or standing – whichever is easiest for you and you can feel this the best – place one hand on your chest and one hand over your bellybutton. If lying down, you can do this with legs bent or straight out, whichever is more comfortable. If sitting or standing, make sure you have good posture to give your lungs space to expand fully.

Take a deep breath in through your nose and focus on feeling the hand on your belly rise. When you breathe out, the hand on your stomach should lower. Less is more - you don't have to push the belly out or suck it in, just calmly breathe in and out and notice where the breath is moving the body. Try to keep your inhale and exhale the same length: three seconds in, three out, four in, four out, or whatever feels like a good ratio for you.

Notice what happens if you breathe into the top hand: feel how much more motion and muscle activity there is. Air is still getting into the lungs, but it takes much more effort! This is also the way we breathe when we are stressed out, upset, or struggling to get enough air into the lungs.

If you go back to belly breathing, pay attention not just to the hand on your belly – notice if you can feel your ribs expanding at your sides, and your back pressing against the ground or against the back of the chair. Think of yourself taking a 360° circular breath, expanding like a balloon or a ripple in a pond with every inhale.

***There are several other breathing techniques we intend to add to this list and to our video collection over the coming weeks and months. Please get in touch if you would like to be informed when we update these resources.***