

Lung Problems: Breathing Exercises

Some health problems, like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), make it hard to breathe. But there are exercises and other things you can do to help move air in and out of your lungs so that you can feel better.

Doing these exercises regularly can help your breathing. And practicing them often can prepare you to use them correctly when you need them. First, let's look at pursed-lip breathing.

This exercise helps you breathe more air out so that your next breath can be deeper. You do it by breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth, while almost closing your lips.

Breathe in through your nose for about 2 seconds. Then, keeping your lips almost closed, breathe out longer—4 to 6 seconds. You can think of it as "smelling flowers" for the inhale and "blowing out a candle" for the exhale.

The next exercise is called diaphragmatic breathing, or belly breathing. It helps your lungs expand so they take in more air. It also helps strengthen your diaphragm. Your diaphragm is a large muscle that separates your lungs from your belly.

It helps draw air into your lungs as you breathe. Start by lying on your back, or prop yourself up on several pillows. You can also sit in a chair or stand.

Put one hand on your belly and the other on your chest. Breathe in through your nose. Let your breath push your belly out as far as possible. You should feel the hand on your belly move out, while the hand on your chest doesn't move.

Then, when you breathe out—through your mouth—you should feel the hand on your belly move in. Try practicing both exercises—pursed-lip breathing and belly breathing—3 or 4 times a day. Plan to do each exercise for about 10 minutes.

As you get more comfortable doing these breathing exercises every day, you can also do them to feel better whenever you are short of breath. And here's another tip for those times when you feel short of breath. Try breathing while bending forward at the waist.

You can bend forward slightly at the waist, but keep your back straight. If you're standing, you may want to put your hands on the edge of a table or the back of a chair. Bending forward helps your diaphragm move more easily.

You can do this while you exercise or while resting. And you can also do it while sitting.

With every breath you take, these exercises may be just what you need to help improve how you feel and breathe.