



## Managing Chest Pain from Sickle Cell Pain

Many people with sickle cell anemia experience chest pain, a sensation of pressure on the chest, or a feeling of tightness in the chest. Some people have described it as a heavy weight on their chest or feel as though their lungs are closed off, making it difficult to breathe. These symptoms can be very uncomfortable and can also cause a lot of stress.

Relaxation has been shown to ease breathing, reduce the sensation of chest tightness or chest pain, and improve oxygen levels. So, if you have any chest pain or discomfort, or if you feel you sometimes can't get enough air, this is a great exercise for you.

To begin, stretch out someplace comfortable. If possible, have your head and chest propped up slightly higher than the rest of you. Allow yourself to feel fully supported in your bed or chair, or wherever you might be. Now soften the muscles in your neck, shoulders, arms, and legs.

If you are not able find comfort reclining or sitting back in a chair, you may want to try the alternate position of leaning slightly forward in a chair or bed and using your elbows to prop yourself up on the arms of the chair or on your knees. This position can be comforting when your chest feels tight so feel free to give this a try and see if it makes a difference for you.

Once you are settled in a comfortable position bring your attention to the muscles in your body. Notice any areas of tension. And, focus on letting the tension in your muscles just drain away. All your muscles to feel soft and relaxed.

Now, gently place your hands on your belly, resting them just over your belly button. When we practice breathing in this exercise, your goal is to bring your air down into your belly and imagine that you are trying to hold on to, or catch your breath with your hands. Think of your hands as being like a target. Our goal is to pass the air through the nose, down into the lungs, and all the way down to your hands. So, rest your hands comfortably on your belly. Stay relaxed and at ease.

When we practice breathing in this exercise, just take in as much air as is comfortable for you. There is no need to strain. No need to increase tension. Keep your neck, back, and shoulders soft and relaxed. Your body will know when it's reached its limit and wherever that is, is just fine. As long as your air is coming into your belly so you can hold on to it with your hands, you are doing just fine.



To start, breathe all of your air out of your belly and lungs. The best way to do this is to imagine that you are breathing out through a drinking straw. When you close your lips except for a small opening in the middle, you have much more control over the air and can exhale for longer. This will help to ensure you are releasing of all the air in a slow and relaxed way. Once you've exhaled, pause for just a moment. Now slowly breathe in through your nose.

Once you are filled with air and you can feel that you are holding that air in your hands, pause for just a moment. Now, breathe out through your mouth just as if you were breathing out through a straw. Remember to keep your muscles loose and keep your body relaxed.

Once you have released all of your air, pause for just a moment. Now, we're going to repeat. Breathe in through your nose, filling your lungs and then passing that oxygen rich air into your belly where you can hold it with your hands. Hold for just a moment. Then slowly release as if you are breathing out through a straw. Relaxed and calm. Slow and effortless.

Again, slowly inhale through your nose, bringing this cool oxygen filled air down into your lungs and through to your hands. Breathe at your own pace. That's right. You've got it.

Notice how your chest is just beginning to open. Just beginning to relax. Just by receiving this air, and releasing tension you may already be experiencing more soothing sensations. More comfort. More healing.

Continuing to breathe in slowly through your nose and passing the air all the way past your lungs into your belly where you can hold it for a for a moment or two. Gently holding onto that breath with your hands. And, when you are ready, releasing the air through your imaginary straw. Continue to release your air until your belly is empty. Wherever your body tells you to stop is the right place. You are doing a wonderful job.

Now, I invite you to close your eyes if they are not already closed. Maintaining your steady breath and relaxed body, just take a moment to relax and listen to my voice.



If you are an early morning person you may have noticed that there are several kinds of flowers that open with the sun at the start of each day. One flower that acts in this way is the lotus flower. This flower, sometimes known as a water lily, is best known for floating gently on top of a pond. But it didn't always float like this. Every lotus flower starts at the bottom of the pond covered in mud and muck. The flower must make its way to the top of the pond where it can open its petals into the sun. You can think of your chest as being like this lotus flower. It may have felt heavy, covered in mud or muck, but now as your breathing has started ease, imagine that your chest is like this lotus flower, making its way to the surface of the pond where it will have fresh air and warm sun to help it grow.

The petals on the lotus flower can be yellow, orange, red, white, purple, pink, or blue. And, the flowers can range in size, with some blossoms sitting comfortably in the palm of your hand, and others growing much, much larger in size. Imagine now the color and size of the lotus flower you are thinking about. Watch as the flower rises to the surface of the pond, leaving all the mud and muck behind. Reaching the surface of the water, watch as the petals start to open into the warm sunlight.

Imagine now that with every breath you take in, you bring warmth and sunlight into the center of the flower, and with every breath out, the petals on the flower open further and further. Easily, effortlessly. Calm and relaxed. Notice the control you have. Notice how little effort it takes. Opening your chest up more and more. More comfort and more ease.

And, just by showing your body that you can indeed ease your breath, you are teaching your body not to worry. You are teaching your muscles to stay relaxed so that you can breathe with more and more comfort. More and more ease. You are noticing that you can make a difference in your chest sensation. That you can release feelings of tightness and replace them with more relaxed sensations, more comfortable breaths, and more ease.