



# Breathe Well to Be Well

Asthma New Zealand's guide to breathing effectively for people with COPD

## For further information please contact your local asthma society

This pamphlet is designed to assist you with breathing awareness. If you have any difficulties following this guide, discuss your breathing with your GP or a respiratory physiotherapist.



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**asthma**

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## Why do you need to breathe well?

When the structure of the lungs change, the amount of work it takes to breathe increases.

Normally, the diaphragm is the main breathing muscle. However, in severe COPD, the upper chest muscles become the main breathing muscles. And sometimes these muscles can be overused, cause muscle fatigue, general fatigue and further shortness of breath.

Another common problem is not breathing out enough, so too much air stays in the lungs (hyperinflation). Hyperinflation also increases muscle work and further shortness of breath.

### The aim of effective breathing

- Is to save energy
- Allows relaxation of muscles
- Reduces shortness of breath
- Reduces stress
- Gives you breathing control
- Allows better relaxation of mind and body

### How to breathe effectively

- 1 While sitting, place your hands on your chest and abdomen
- 2 Breathe in through your nose and you should feel your hand on your abdomen gently rise
- 3 Breathe out gently through your nose or lips and feel your hand drop. As you do this try to relax your shoulders
- 4 Practice feeling the breath become rhythmical, relaxed and effortless

### Upon movement

Upon exertion breathing often changes and becomes more laboured. Pursed lip breathing helps to regulate the amount of air you breathe and this helps to save energy.

#### Task 1: Try pursed lip breathing:

- Breathe in slowly through your nose
- Purse your lips as if to whistle and breathe out through the pursed lips taking twice as long to exhale
- Pause – then inhale through the nose again and exhale through pursed lips. It is important to maintain a pace and rhythm when exercising. Counting can often assist with this task – especially on inclines and stairs.

For example:

**Breathe in as you Step Up 1-2-3 Steps & Breathe Out as you step up 1-2-3 Steps**

#### Pause

Continue; make sure you find a rhythm that suits you, it may be breathing in and out with each step.

#### Task 2:

A good way to remind yourself to regulate your breathing and to pause is to place dots around work and home – on the fridge, phone, the bottom of the stairs etc. When you pass a dot, remember to pause, let go of your shoulders, and then breathe through the nose – low and slow.

Additionally, use the dots to remind you to slow down the speed at which you walk, talk and eat.

### The importance of posture

#### Good posture

The body is in line, allowing air in and out effectively and effortlessly.

#### Poor posture

When the body is rigid or slouched, the airflow becomes rigid.

#### What to do when you become short of breath

Use relaxed breathing in the following positions:

- Sitting
- Sitting upright
- Standing leaning back

Joining the Asthma Society is a positive step towards making sure that breathlessness doesn't ruin your life. Look in the Telephone Book for the number of your local society.



### Please tick all boxes that are relevant

- Are you bringing up phlegm most days?
- Over 40?
- Coughing in the morning?
- A current ex-smoker?
- A little breathless when exercising?
- Currently using a reliever? (But unsure of whether it still gives you the same relief it used to)...

Ticking three or more of the above boxes could indicate **COPD**.

Please either take this form back to your GP or contact Asthma New Zealand for a free assessment phone 09 623 0236 or post it back to Asthma New Zealand.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

My Doctor is: \_\_\_\_\_

I currently take the following inhaled medicines:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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