

Information for Patients

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Physiotherapy Service

Diaphragmatic breathing is also known as belly or tummy breathing.

What is the Diaphragm?

The diaphragm is a large, dome-shaped muscle located at the base of the lungs. It contracts rhythmically and continually, when we breathe.

Why Practise Diaphragmatic Breathing?

Very often, in day to day life we breathe shallowly mostly using our upper chest, rather than focusing on using our diaphragm.

Evidence has shown that focusing our breathing using the diaphragm has many benefits:

- It helps your pelvic floor muscles to release or relax
- It helps you to relax
- It can improve your mood
- It can reduce anxiety and stress

How do you Practise Diaphragmatic Breathing?

Sit or lie comfortably with one hand lightly on your upper chest and one hand on your upper abdomen (tummy or belly), where it meets your lower ribs.

Focus your attention on your breathing.

If comfortable for you, breathe in slowly through your nose, and then out through either your nose or mouth.

Aim to keep your upper chest more relaxed as you breathe in and out. You may need to adjust your position or posture so that the bottom of your ribcage can move freely. If you are slouched then the ribcage may be restricted.

Try imagining that you have a balloon in your abdomen and as you breathe in, the balloon is gently inflating with the breath. This should cause your tummy to gently rise, and your lower ribs to lift outwards. As you breathe out, imagine the balloon gently deflating – your abdomen should gently fall.

You can also visualise or imagine your pelvic floor muscles ‘releasing’, ‘relaxing’ or ‘letting go’ with each breathe in.

Continue with this breathing technique for a few minutes at a time. The aim is to slow and re-direct the breaths, not practice deep breathing, which could make you feel light-headed. If this happens, return to your usual breathing until it settles.

As with any new skill, the more you practise, the easier it will get. Repeat short sessions throughout the day, or as often as you find useful.

You may find the following YouTube video useful:

Physio Guided Slow Breathing Exercises to Relieve Stress (Michelle Kenway)
[Physio Guided Slow Breathing Exercises \(Pranayama\) to Relieve Stress - YouTube](#)

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg