Breathing exercises for Asthma

Breathing exercises to improve lung function and reduce symptoms naturally.

LÆTITIA GEORGES

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Breathing exercises and relaxation techniques can be beneficial additions to asthma management, helping to control symptoms, improve quality of life, and reduce hyperventilation. These techniques are not a replacement for prescribed medication but can help strengthen respiratory muscles and promote relaxation.

Here are several efficient exercises supported by clinical research:

1. Diaphragmatic Breathing (Belly Breathing)

This technique strengthens the diaphragm, the main muscle of breathing, allowing for deeper and more efficient air intake. It can help reduce the work of breathing and improve lung function.

How to perform it:

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
- Place one hand on your upper chest and the other on your belly, just below your rib cage.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose, allowing your belly to push out against your hand. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
- Tighten your abdominal muscles and let them fall inward as you exhale through pursed lips.
- Practice for 5–10 minutes at a time, several times a day.

The Diaphragm: Your Body's Hidden Powerhouse

LÆTITIA GEORGES · FEB 16

The diaphragm is a remarkable, dome-shaped muscle that plays several crucial roles in the human body, primarily related to breathing but also impacting other physiological functions.

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2. The Buteyko Method

The Buteyko breathing technique aims to normalize breathing volume and reduce hyperventilation by increasing carbon dioxide levels in the blood, which can help relax airway muscles. Studies suggest it can improve quality of life and reduce hyperventilation symptoms in adults with mild to moderate asthma.

How to perform it:

- Sit upright with a straight back and relax your shoulders.
- Take a small, gentle breath in through your nose and a small breath out through your nose.
- Pinch your nose gently to hold your breath.
- Hold until you feel a moderate desire to breathe (do not hold until you are struggling).
- Release your nose and rest, breathing gently through your nose.
- Repeat this cycle several times. The goal is to keep breathing light and slow.

3. The Papworth Method

This method combines breathing retraining with relaxation techniques. It teaches you to breathe slowly and steadily from your diaphragm, using your nose, and to relax your muscles to prevent breathlessness. It is often used to manage the anxiety and panic that can accompany asthma symptoms.

How to perform it:

- Find a quiet place and relax your body.
- Practice breathing slowly and deeply through your nose, focusing on expanding your belly rather than your chest.
- When you feel breathless or anxious, use your “breath control point” — a gentle, relaxed breath — to stay calm.
- Combine this with progressive muscle relaxation, tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups.

4. Pursed-Lip Breathing

This technique helps keep your airways open longer, which can reduce shortness of breath and help you exhale trapped air from your lungs.

How to perform it:

- Relax your neck and shoulder muscles.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose for two counts.
- Pucker or “pout” your lips as if you were going to whistle.
- Breathe out slowly and gently through your pursed lips for four counts (or longer, if comfortable).

5. Yogic Breathing (Pranayama)

Yogic breathing exercises, particularly those focusing on exhalation, can improve lung function and asthma control. Practices like *Anulom Vilom* (alternate nostril breathing) help calm the mind and relieve stress, which can be a trigger for asthma.

How to perform it:

- Sit in a comfortable position with a straight spine.
- Close your right nostril with your thumb and inhale slowly through your left nostril.
- Close your left nostril with your ring finger, release your thumb, and exhale slowly through your right nostril.
- Inhale through your right nostril, then close it and exhale through your left.

- This completes one cycle. Practice for 5–10 minutes.

Important Considerations

- **Consult Your Doctor** if you have severe asthma, consult your healthcare provider to ensure it is safe for you.
- **Consistency is Key:** Regular practice is more effective than occasional sessions. Aim for at least 10 minutes a day.
- **Stop if Uncomfortable:** If you feel dizzy, lightheaded, or more short of breath, stop the exercise and return to your normal breathing pattern. Breathing exercises are meant to complement, not replace, your asthma action plan.

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