

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Physiotherapy Patient Information



Patient Information

Introduction

Breathing is automatic, but also under our voluntary control. How we breathe can have a major impact on pelvic floor function as well as our overall well-being.

Why?

When you breathe in, your diaphragm flattens and lowers. When you breathe out, it lifts up.

So what?

As you exhale, you enable the pelvic floor to also lift and tighten. It can also naturally relax slightly as you inhale. So, your pelvic floor will work better when it is working with your breath.

Learning to breathe well will also help with relaxing an overactive pelvic floor and can reduce pelvic or abdominal pain.

If you learn to slow and deepen your breath, your body will be more able to relax. Conversely, shallow breathing increases our stress response.

How to...

Find a relaxed seated position.

Slow and gently deepen the breath.

Aim to inhale for around 4 seconds, exhaling for 5 seconds, breathing through the nose if possible. Place your hands on the lower ribs.

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Try to expand your lungs into your hands – you are aiming for a 360 degree movement here, with a gentle rise and fall (not a push) of the belly and ribs going outwards. Keep your shoulders relaxed.

If it's not working – try wrapping a belt around you, crossing over at the front. Hold it firmly as you breathe against the light pressure of the belt.

Still not happening? Try going into child's pose and focus your breath into the back of the lungs.



Practice this type of breathing daily for at least 10 repetitions, three times a day, until it becomes second nature.

Next Steps: Link your breath to your pelvic floor exercises. See Breathing & Pelvic Floor Exercises leaflet.

Please note that these exercises are a guide and an individualised assessment and exercise programme is often required.

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ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net or telephone 01249 454386.