

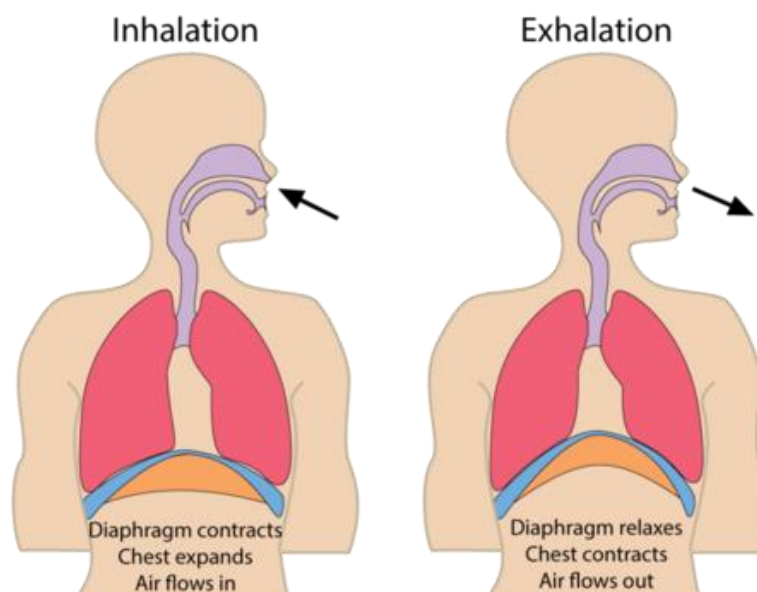
# Diaphragmatic Breathing

Continence Patient Information

Patient  
Information



**Diaphragmatic breathing, abdominal breathing or deep breathing**, is breathing that is done by contracting the diaphragm. The diaphragm is the most efficient breathing muscle. It is a large dome-shaped muscle that separates the lungs and heart above it from the stomach and other internal organs below. To allow the lower areas of the lungs to be inflated when breathing in, the diaphragm needs to be active.

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



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.

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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 do diaphragmatic breathing:**

You can do these breathing exercises in any position. Lying flat with a pillow under your knees is a nice relaxing position to try whilst you get used to trying this.

- Take a deep breath in through your nose and try and direct the breath down towards your stomach and pelvis.
- Look for a feeling of your ribs widening and your tummy muscles expanding
- As you breathe out notice everything deflating.
- If it feels right place one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach and see where you feel the breath most and if you are getting the breath into the stomach.
- Count how many seconds you breathe in for and try making the out breath longer than the inhale.
- Aim for 5 of these breaths to start with, then you can slowly increase the amount of time you spend doing this and how many times a day you incorporate this.

Please note that these exercises are a guide, and an individualised assessment and exercise programme is often required. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact the Continence Service office on 01722 323196. They will be able to direct you to the Pelvic Health Physiotherapist or to a Specialist Continence Nurse. Alternatively, you can email [whc.continencepatient@nhs.net](mailto:whc.continencepatient@nhs.net)

### **Safeguarding**

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If you or your carer have any concerns regarding a child or adult's safety, please phone Wiltshire Safeguarding Team on 0300 456 0111 (Adult) or 0300 456 0108 (Child) (9am – 5pm Monday - Friday) or please call 999 if you feel they are in immediate danger.

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

If you have any questions, or concerns, suggestions or compliments about our service, please speak to a member of staff.

This information sheet is available in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 0300 123 7797 and [whc.pals@nhs.net](mailto:whc.pals@nhs.net)

### **Patient and Public Involvement**

We value your opinions which will help us to further develop our services.

If you wish to provide feedback or get involved in our patient participation groups, please email the Patient and Public Involvement Officer at [ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net](mailto:ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net) or telephone 01249 454386.