

1. Deep breathing exercise

Learning deep breathing is the first step in learning relaxation skills. Being in pain can often lead us into unhelpful breathing habits. However, with a bit of practice changing how you breathe can make a real difference to how you feel. The first thing to do is to become more aware of how *you* tend to breathe.

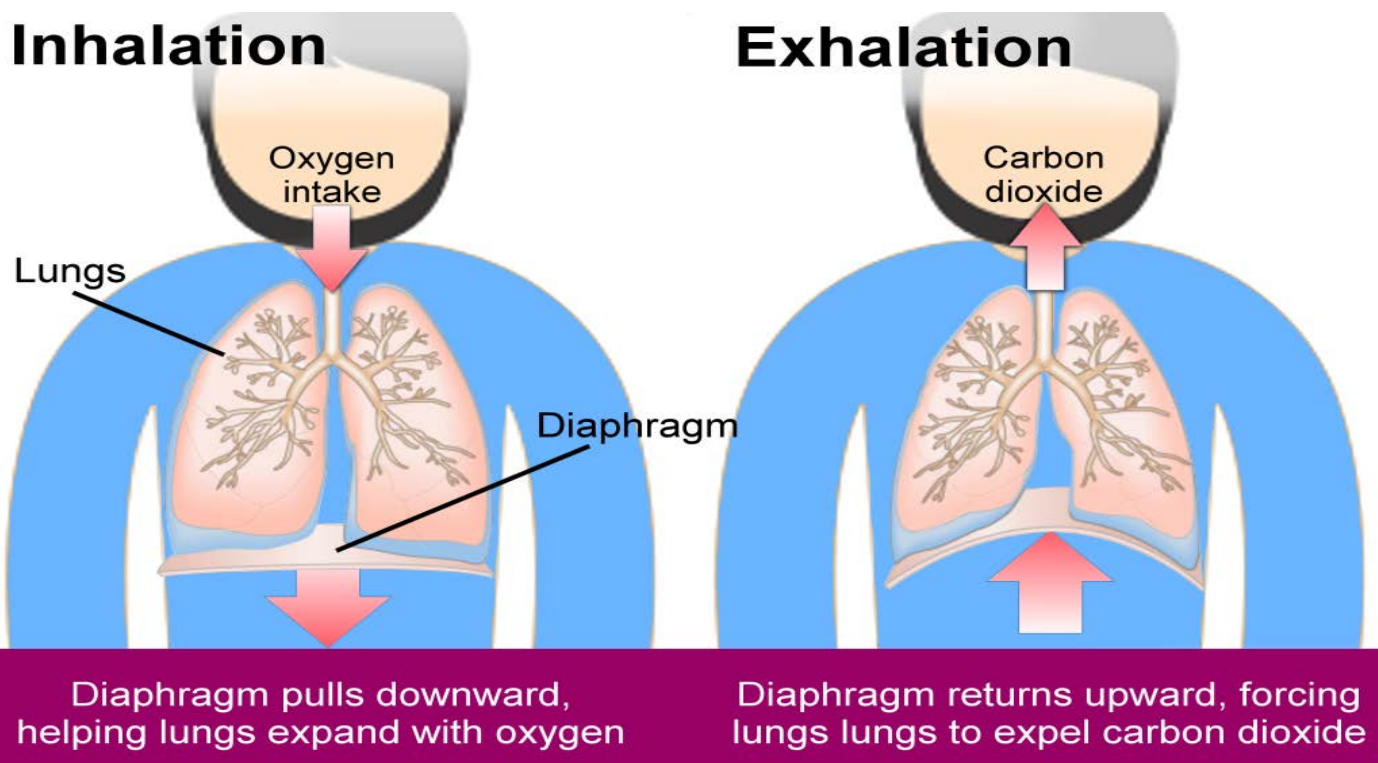
Check your breathing right now!

- Put one hand on your chest.
- Put the other just below your ribcage resting on your tummy.
- Just let your hands rest there for a few moments while you take a few slow deep breaths.
- Notice which hand moves the most.

Your top hand moves the most: You are a 'Chest Breather'. People who are tense and in pain often breathe using only the top part of their lungs and often tend to 'hold' the breath. This is not so good for relaxing and can be linked to muscle tension in the shoulders and neck and tightness in the chest.

Your bottom hand moves the most: You are a 'Belly Breather' or 'Diaphragm Breather'; This type of deep breathing is the best breathing pattern to give you pain and stress relief.

In deep breathing, you are aiming to breathe right down into the bottom of your lungs. The big band of muscle that is underneath the lungs, called the diaphragm, then pushes down and this makes the belly expand.



Deep breathing exercise – how to do it

- Make yourself comfortable on the bed or in a chair. Loosen your shoulders and any tight clothing around your waist.
- Take slow, gentle deep breaths down into the bottom of your lungs - as if you are blowing up a balloon in your belly.



Breathing out (exhaling) with the Diaphragm



Breathing in (inhaling) with the Diaphragm

- Breathe slowly and don't try to force it. You might find it helpful to count – breathe in for the count of 4 seconds and out for the count of 4 seconds. As you get the hang of it, try and slow it down even further. Find a pace that works for you.
- Remember, your belly should be moving more than the top of your chest.
- If you feel a bit dizzy or spacey it simply means you are breathing too fast and too heavily. Try breathing a bit more gently and slowly. Imagine that you are breathing out tension and tightness with each breath out.
- Practice this at least 5 minutes every day

Deep breathing exercise – getting in the habit

It takes practice to get into the habit of deep breathing. To begin with it is best to practice at calmer and quieter times to give yourself the chance to get the hang of it.

When you have got the hang of the breathing exercise, you can use it to relax any time you get tense. With practice you will really feel yourself relaxing and letting go of stress, tension and pain. You might even sleep better.

Quickie relaxation exercises using breathing

- One way of getting into the habit of deep breathing is to practice a few deep breaths whenever you do something familiar e.g. each time you go to the loo, have a drink or check your watch. Putting a reminder on your phone may help. If you can learn to ‘punctuate’ your day with short relaxations you will stop tension levels from building up as the day goes on.
- Take your attention to the place that hurts. As you breathe in breathe towards this place. As you breathe out imagine breathing out from the place that hurts. This may help to ease your experience of pain.
- Pain often makes you hold your breathe. Pay particular attention to your breathing when you are moving. Try and keep it coming from your belly in a slow and gentle rhythm.

