



the asthma foundation
Better respiratory health for New Zealanders

Breathing and asthma

FACT SHEET prepared by The Asthma Foundation

Breathing is something we all take for granted – we do it all the time! However, for a variety of reasons, not everyone breathes as well as they could. For example, some people over-breathe, over-working their upper chest muscles instead of using their diaphragm muscle. Breathing can also be erratic, with yawns, sighs, coughs and sniffs.

Breathing incorrectly can cause too little carbon dioxide in the blood, which can have the following effects:

Increase adrenalin release, which can cause:

- ✦ Shortness of breath
- ✦ Frequent yawning and sighing
- ✦ Chest tightness and chest pain
- ✦ Disturbed sleeping patterns
- ✦ Sore muscles from using the wrong muscles to breathe
- ✦ Stomach problems
- ✦ Anxiety

Cause arteries to constrict, decreasing the blood flow to your brain. This will not cause damage, but you may feel or experience:

- ✦ Dizziness
- ✦ A detached sensation
- ✦ Pins and needles in your hands, mouth and feet
- ✦ Loss of memory

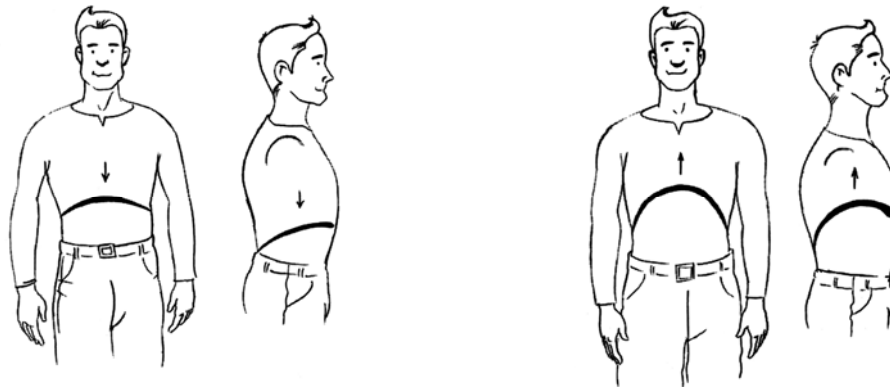
Cause muscles to overwork, resulting in:

- ✦ Headaches
- ✦ Neck, shoulder low back pain

Breathing incorrectly can also cause coughing, worsen breathlessness and even trigger an asthma episode.

Breathe easy! Try these steps:

- ✦ Sit or lie comfortably.
- ✦ Place your hand on your stomach, over your belly button.
- ✦ Breathe out initially through your mouth then take a small breath in through your nose, and feel your tummy swell (as your diaphragm draws down).
- ✦ Breathe out gently through your nose and feel your tummy flatten (as your diaphragm rises).



In-breath: the diaphragm draws down and the tummy swells

Out-breath: the diaphragm rises and the tummy flattens

(from "dynamic breathing for asthma" by Dinah Bradley and Tania Clifton-Smith)

Learn to relax, let your shoulders drop, and breathe in a rhythmical pattern of 10 – 14 breaths per minute. It is important to breathe through your nose as this warms, filters and moistens the air, as well as helping regulate your breathing.

The Asthma Foundation can help you

The Asthma Foundation is New Zealand's not-for-profit sector authority on asthma and other respiratory illnesses. We advocate to government and raise awareness of respiratory illnesses, fund research for better treatments and educate on best practice.

Check out our comprehensive website at www.asthmafoundation.org.nz

For further information on breathing visit www.breathingworks.com or www.bradcliff.com

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