



# Patient education: Breathing exercises (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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## What are breathing exercises?

People with healthy lungs rarely think about their breathing. But breathing can be hard if you have lung problems like asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease ("COPD").

Breathing exercises can help you:

- Strengthen the muscles you use when you breathe
- Breathe more easily
- Get more oxygen into your lungs and more carbon dioxide out of your lungs

## What breathing exercises should I do?

Below are some common breathing exercises. Your doctor or nurse might tell you to do other exercises, too.

Practice these breathing exercises 10 times each. Try to do your exercises 3 to 4 times each day. You can lie on your back or sit up straight in a chair to do these exercises.

- Diaphragmatic breathing ( [figure 1](#)):
  - Place 1 hand over your abdomen and the other on your chest.
  - Slowly take a deep breath in through your nose. When you do this, think about your breath moving the hand on your abdomen out. This pulls more air into your lungs. The hand on your chest should not move very much if you are breathing the right way.
  - Breathe out slowly through pursed lips. Gently press on your belly as you breathe out. This will push up on your diaphragm to help get your air out.
  - Repeat.
- Pursed-lip breathing ( [figure 2](#)):

- Breathe in through your nose for about 2 seconds, as if you are smelling something.
- Pucker your lips as if you were going to blow out birthday candles.
- Slowly breathe out. Try to breathe out for at least twice as long as you breathed in.
- Repeat.
- Tissue or pinwheel exercise (uses both diaphragmatic and pursed-lip breathing) ([figure 3](#)):
  - Hold a tissue or pinwheel in front of your mouth with 1 hand, or have someone hold it for you.
  - Use diaphragmatic breathing to take a deep breath in.
  - Breathe out slowly through pursed lips, and watch the pinwheel spin or tissue move.
  - Repeat, but with each breath in, move the tissue or pinwheel a little farther away from your mouth. Keep moving the object farther away until the tissue or pinwheel no longer moves when you breathe out.
- Box breathing:
  - Breathe in through your nose for about 4 seconds, as if you are smelling something.
  - Hold your breath for 4 to 7 seconds. Try not to inhale or exhale during this time.
  - Breathe out very slowly through your mouth for about 8 seconds.
  - Repeat.

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## What else should I know?

Stop doing breathing exercises if you become dizzy, more short of breath, or have chest pain.

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## More on this topic

[Patient education: Asthma in adults \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Asthma in children \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease \(COPD\) \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Cystic fibrosis \(The Basics\)](#)

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Patient education: Breathing tests (The Basics)

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Patient education: Asthma treatment in adolescents and adults (Beyond the Basics)

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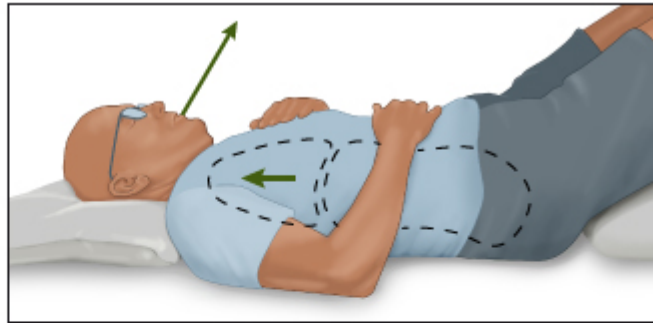
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## GRAPHICS

### Diaphragmatic breathing

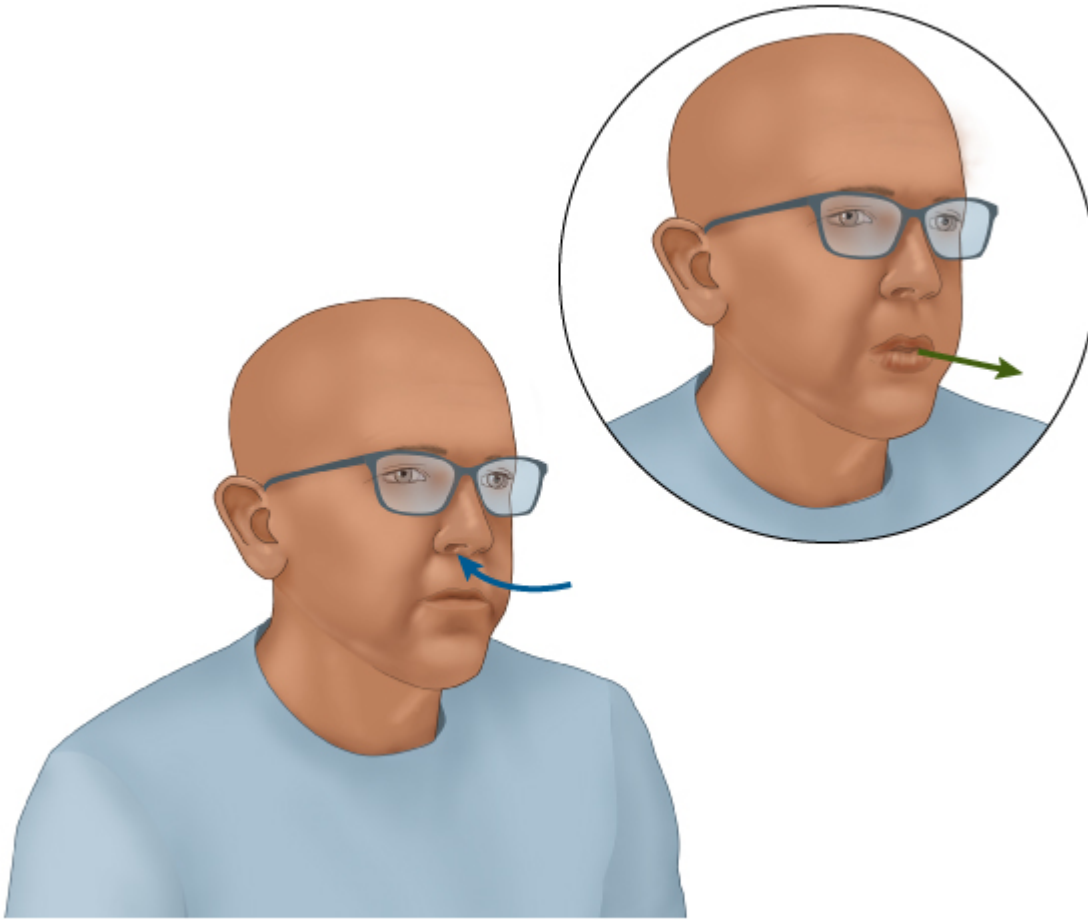


Place 1 hand over your abdomen and the other on your chest. Slowly take a deep breath in through your nose. When you do this, think about your breath moving the hand on your abdomen out. The hand on your chest should not move very much if you are breathing the right way. Breathe out slowly through pursed lips. Gently press on your belly as you breathe out. Repeat.

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## Pursed lip breathing

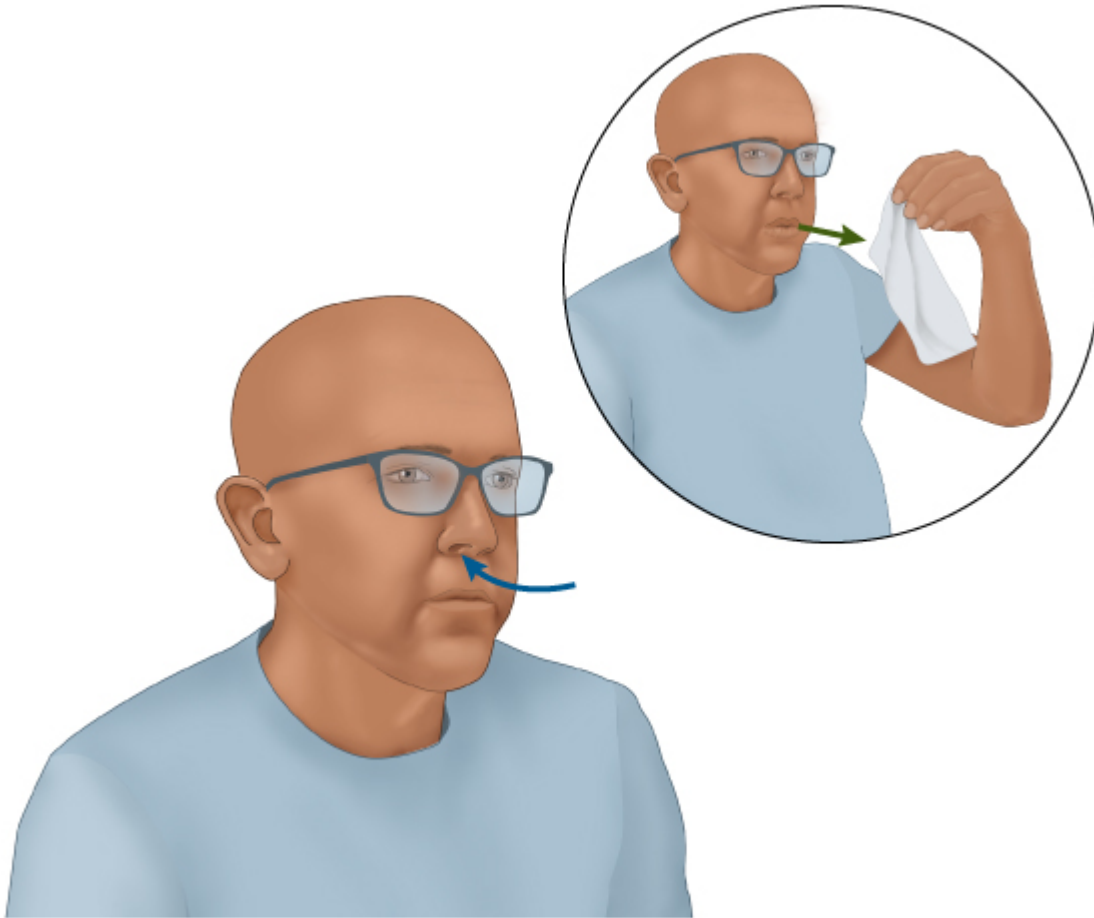


Breathe in through your nose for about 2 seconds as if you are smelling something. Purse your lips as if you were going to blow out birthday candles. Slowly breathe out. Try to breathe out at least 2 times as long as you breathed in. Repeat.

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## Tissue or pinwheel exercises



Hold a tissue or pinwheel in front of your mouth with 1 hand or have someone hold it for you. Use diaphragmatic breathing to take a deep breath in. Breathe out slowly through pursed lips, and watch the pinwheel spin or tissue move. Repeat, but with each breath in, move the tissue or pinwheel a little farther away from your mouth. Keep moving the object farther away until the tissue or pinwheel no longer moves when you breathe out.

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