

COVID-19 April 2020

Breathing Exercises

In response to the current COVID-19 situation, it is important to be proactive in maintaining a healthy and clear chest by completing regular breathing exercises. The following technique is a simple way to encourage airway clearance.

Active Cycle of Breathing Techniques

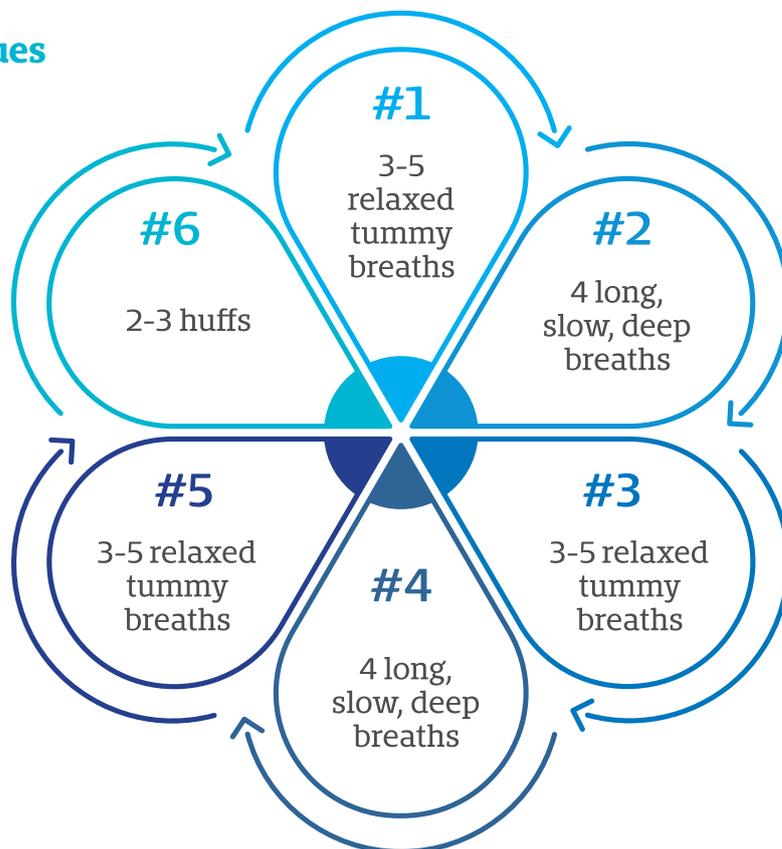
Active Cycle of Breathing Techniques (ACBT) can be used as a preventative measure, helping to improve breathing control, and is one way to clear sputum or phlegm from the chest.

It's a simple exercise which is best done regularly (ideally twice daily). It only takes a few minutes to complete, and is easily incorporated into daily routines.

This technique combines normal, relaxed breathing, deep breathing and 'huffing', and is effective for the majority of people who have sputum.

NeuroRehab Allied Health Network's physiotherapists can help you complete this program effectively and may tailor it to your specific needs and ability via Telehealth.

Repeat these exercises 2-3 times per day for prevention, or more frequently if you develop cold or flu symptoms.



How to do it

Breathing Components

1. Sit in a comfortable position, relax your shoulders and do a 3-5 normal relaxed tummy breaths (allowing your tummy to expand as you inhale).
2. Now take 4 long, slow, deep breaths in, as deep as is comfortable, and then slowly breathe out. Breathe in through your nose. Take your time. If you can, hold your breath in for a couple of seconds. Breathe the air all the way out, keeping relaxed. It may help to breathe out through your mouth.
3. Return to normal relaxed tummy breathing.
4. Take another 4 long, slow, deep breaths as above.
5. Return to normal, relaxed tummy breathing.

You can repeat the previous steps a couple of times if you are able. This part is helping to open the airways, and get air moving deeper into your lungs. When you feel there is some sputum to clear, try 2 or 3 'huffs' (described below).

Huffing

A huff is a forced breath out.

1. Start by taking a small to medium breath in.
2. Open your mouth wide.
3. Force all the air out of your open mouth. This should be fairly fast and you should feel your tummy muscles contract to help push the air out. Imagine you are steaming up a mirror with your breath. Where possible huff/cough into a tissue to minimise droplet spread.
4. A huff is quite short and sharp.

Huffing helps to keep the airways open and allows the sputum to move up and out. A huff uses less energy than coughing and is more effective.

After a couple of huffs, you may need to cough. This is quite normal. You may also need to cough when huffing has not been effective following repeated attempts. Only use a cough if this is the case. It is important to avoid long bouts of coughing as this can be very tiring and may make you feel breathless, or make your throat or chest sore or tight.

How long should I do it for?

Repeat the whole breathing cycle as often as you need to in order to clear as much sputum as you can.

As a rough guide, complete for 2-4 cycles per session.