

The Active Cycle of Breathing Technique

Information Factsheet

The Active cycle of Breathing Technique is used to help with the removal of mucus (which you may hear called sputum) from your lungs, and also to reduce the effort of breathing.

To carry this technique out, find a comfortable, well supported position. Some people find that leaning forwards in a chair or sitting upright in a chair is helpful.

The Active Cycle of Breathing Technique consists of;

Breathing Control (diaphragmatic or relaxed breathing)

This technique is used to make sure your breathing is as relaxed and as gentle as it can be.

- Your breathing should be gentle, normal, breathing using the lower chest and through your nose if you can.
- As you breathe in, place a hand on your stomach and you should feel it rise, indicating the action of the diaphragm.
- Your upper chest, neck and shoulders should also be relaxed.
- You should return to this way of breathing to give yourself a rest between the more active techniques.

Deep breaths

Deep breaths help get the air behind the mucus that is in the airways of your lungs. The emphasis here is on taking a big breath in through the nose to warm and purify the air.

- Try and breathe deeply so your lungs feel full of air
- If possible, hold your breath for 2 or 3 seconds.
- Let the air out gently through your nose or mouth.

- You may need to do a few cycles of deep breathing and breathing control before you do a huff if your mucus is sticky

Huffing

A huff helps clear any mucus from your lungs, and is often a more effective technique than a cough. You keep your mouth and throat open when you are performing a huff and imagine that you are trying to steam up a mirror.

- Take a medium breath in, and then squeeze the air out slowly but strongly.
- Do not huff too hard as this can make you wheeze.

After each huff, practice the breathing control technique to stop the airways in your lungs tightening up.

Breathing sequence

1. Breathing control-approx 15 seconds
2. Deep breathing-4 breaths
3. Breathing control-approx 15 seconds
4. Deep breathing-4 breaths
5. Breathing control-approx 15 seconds
6. Huff x 1 or 2 and cough if necessary
7. Breathing control

Repeat the sequence in a cycle until the mucus has cleared. We recommend you continue with this for at least 5 minutes, 1 or 2 times per day to keep your lungs free of mucus.

