

Breathing Exercises to Increase Lung Function

Overview

Your Lung capacity is the total amount of air that your lungs can hold. Over time, our lung capacity and lung function typically decrease slowly as we age after our mid-20's. Some conditions like COPD and pulmonary fibrosis can speed up these reductions leading to difficulty in breathing and shortness of breath.

Exercises

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing or belly breathing engages the diaphragm, which is supposed to do most of the “heavy lifting when it comes to breathing.

Exercises to strengthen your diaphragm:

- Relax your shoulders and sit back or lie down
- Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest
- Inhale through your nose for two seconds, feeling the air move into your abdomen and feeling your stomach move out. Your stomach should move more than your chest does
- Breath out for 2 seconds through pursed lip breathing while pressing down on your abdomen.

Pursed Lip Breathing

Pursed-lip breathing can slow down your breathing, reducing the work of breathing by keeping your airways open longer. This makes it easier for the lungs to function and improves the exchange of oxygen carbon dioxide. This is often better for beginners than is diaphragmatic breathing.

How to practice pursed-lip breathing:

- Inhale slowly through your nostrils
- Purse your lips, as if you are blowing out a candle.
- Breathe out as slowly as possible through pursed lips. This should take at least twice as long as it did to breathe in.
- Repeat

Rib Stretch

This exercise is easy to use, and it can be done by anyone. It works by holding as much air in the lungs for as long as is safe as possible. This can help improve lung function and capacity when used at least once per day.

How to do the rib stretch exercise technique:

- Stand upright with your back arched.
- Put your hands on your hips with your thumbs in the front and all 4 fingers wrapped around back.
- Exhale all the oxygen from your lungs.
- Breathe in slowly, filling your lungs as much as possible.
- Hold your breath for 5-10 seconds.
- Slowly exhale.

Numbered Breathing

This breathing exercise can benefit anyone looking to increase their lung capacity. Numbered breathing requires that you breathe in and out to an increasing pattern of counts.

To perform this exercise:

- Stand still and take a deep breath with your eyes closed.
- Force all the air out of your lungs when you exhale.
- As you inhale again, count to 1, hold your breath for 1 second then exhale for 1 second
- Do the same maneuver up until the number 8
- Remember sometimes this will take a while to build up, do not get discouraged

Meditation

Sit in a calm quiet environment. The less energy you expend the more energy you will have for breathing. Do any type of deep breathing exercise as mentioned above in the quiet environment for 10 minutes per day to help release all the negative thought and energy from your body.

Yoga

Yoga helps you control your life force and is aimed at increasing your vital energy in the mid body and spirit. It also helps you relax so that breathing becomes less of an effort.

Balloon Exercise

Blowing a balloon is a great method for increasing lung capacity. It improves the lungs ability to pump more air. (Think of this as weight lifting for your lungs)