

Dysfunctional breathing

You received this brochure because you've been diagnosed as suffering from dysfunctional breathing. Read the brochure to find out exactly what this is and what can be done about it. Of course, it's also a good idea to let your parents read it as well.

Cause

If you suffer from 'dysfunctional breathing', your breathing does not match your activity at that moment. For example, you breathe quickly while lying calmly in bed. Or you breathe deeply while calmly sitting on your chair during class. If this occurs, you're likely breathing more with your chest than your stomach.

Exertion

It's also possible that you experience dysfunctional breathing while exerting yourself. You try to keep breathing slowly, but you have to gasp due to the exertion. Or you use your shoulder muscles or the muscles around your chest too much, causing you to have very high and rapid breathing.

Respiratory centre

Your respiratory centre regulates your breathing. This process is automatic, meaning that you don't have to think about breathing. Otherwise, this would end up tiring you out! If you have a dysfunctional breathing pattern, your respiratory centre becomes slightly disrupted. This causes you to take even deeper breaths and to breathe more quickly. This, in turn, causes all manner of reactions in your body.

For example, you may suffer from:

- dizziness
- tingling
- feeling confused
- headaches
- tiredness
- stomach pain
- heart palpitations
- chest tightness

Many symptoms are associated with dysfunctional breathing.

Development of dysfunctional breathing

It's not often clear why dysfunctional breathing develops. The reason differs for each person. Tension, stress, anxiety, chest tightness due to severe colds or asthma and stomach pain are all common causes of dysfunctional breathing. You may already have had dysfunctional breathing for a long time, but the accompanying symptoms are worsening.

Solution

First of all, it's important for you to know what is going on with you. Once you determine that your symptoms are caused by dysfunctional breathing, then there are many steps you can take to remedy this.

Breathing exercises will teach you how to guide your own breathing. And relaxation exercises may also be very beneficial. And don't forget to continue to exercise and practice sports! If you know how to keep your breathing under control while exercising, it will be easier to do sports, and you can exercise for longer durations.

Breathing exercises

Exercise 1

Breathe in and out through your nose. Do not try to guide your breathing, the only thing you need to do consciously is to take a pause after exhaling. So, inhale through your nose, exhale out through your nose and then take a pause. You don't have to pause as long as possible, just until you feel the need to inhale again. The biggest advantage of this exercise is that you can always do it without others being aware of what you're doing.

Exercise 2

Breathe in through your nose, but not too deeply. Exhale out your mouth, extend your exhale by pouting your lips and then take a pause. You don't have to pause as long as possible, just until you feel the need to inhale again.

Becoming aware of your breathing and sending your breath to your stomach

Go ahead and lie down on your back. Choose somewhere you can relax without being disrupted by anyone (or your telephone). Select a time when you can be relaxed (so be sure that you're not in a hurry). Once you're lying comfortably, place your hands on your stomach. Try to relax your shoulders and your neck. Feel what happens with your stomach when you breathe in, and what happens when you breathe out. Do you feel your stomach calmly rising and falling? Or do you feel your breathing more in your chest? If so, try to send your breathing down to your stomach.

If you struggle to do this, you could try to think about the following: Imagine that there is a balloon in your stomach, roughly underneath your navel. As you breathe in, the balloon inflates slightly with air. When you breathe out, the balloon slowly empties.

Calmer breathing

How quickly are you breathing? You can count how long it takes you to inhale as well as exhale. How many breaths do you take in a minute? If you are between the ages of 12 and 18, it's normal to take between 12 to 15 breaths per minute while at rest. Do not inhale too deeply. If you're lying at rest, your body does not require much oxygen. A small inhalation is sufficient. Breathe in through your nose for perhaps 2 counts. Breathe out calmly, and take your time with the exhalation. In any event, be sure that your exhale lasts longer than your inhale. If it's difficult for you to exhale calmly, you can bring your lips closer together, pressing them slightly, and release the air very slowly. It may help if you breathe out this way for between 4 to 6 seconds. It may also help if you release the air in 'puffs'. You can try exhaling for 4 'puffs'.

15 minutes per day

Are you able to calm down your breathing a bit? Are you still breathing through your stomach? Then it's going well. Try doing these exercises for 15 minutes per day. It may take your body some time to get used to this new breathing pattern. You might be aware of this because you feel a bit dizzy or drowsy or have to yawn a lot. This is normal! These symptoms usually disappear after practicing a few times.

Questions

If you have any questions about this brochure, you can contact the Outpatient Clinic Paediatrics at +31 (0)20 - 755 7028.