

# Hyperventilation Syndrome & Breathing Control Advice

## WHAT IS HYPERVENTILATION SYNDROME?

Hyperventilation is over-breathing, i.e. breathing more than is necessary to meet the body's requirements.

Over-breathing is a normal reaction to any stressful or anxious situation, and generally breathing will return to its normal rate after the event has passed.

Occasionally due to prolonged stress or a physical trigger, a pattern of continued over-breathing occurs and a normal rate of breathing does not return.

## SYMPTOMS OF OVER-BREATHING

You may be aware of some or all of the symptoms. Listed are some of those most commonly experienced:

- Frequent yawning and sighing
- Feeling breathless even after relatively minor exercise
- Light-headedness
- Difficulty co-ordinating breathing and talking and/or eating
- Pins and needles in hands/arms/around mouth
- Palpitations
- Exhaustion with no apparent cause
- Muscular aches and tension around neck/shoulders/jaw
- Dizziness
- Feeling dissociated, 'spaced out' or 'woolly headed'

## TREATMENT AND SELF-HELP

Gaining control over your breathing can be difficult. Below are listed some useful tips and techniques to help you.

1. **Breathing control** – taking control of your breathing with specially-designed exercises to restore normal breathing patterns (see overleaf for effective breathing exercises).
2. **Relaxation** – taking time to relax can be a very effective way to regain control on your breathing as it helps you to slow down.
3. **Diet** – Try to take regular balanced meals. Snacking on foods high in carbohydrate results in your sugar levels rising and falling rapidly which can act as a trigger for over-breathing.
4. **Posture Correction** – maintaining a good posture is essential to a good breathing pattern. Being hunched or slouched restricts room for your diaphragm to move freely, reducing effective breathing.
5. **Speech** – speaking quickly and taking large gasps between long sentences can make your breathing worse. Try to slow down, pausing and taking a small breath after each sentence.

## BREATHING CONTROL EXERCISES

These are designed to restore breathing to a normal rate of 12-16 breaths per minute, by ensuring effective use of the main muscle for breathing – the diaphragm.

When we breathe in (inspiration), the diaphragm contracts and flattens, creating space for the air to flow through the airways and into the lungs. When you breathe out the diaphragm relaxes and pushes the air out of the chest (exhalation).

During inspiration the diaphragm contracts and flattens and the stomach is pushed forward and out. During exhalation the diaphragm relaxes and the stomach returns to its resting position. Throughout the whole of this cycle the top part of the lungs remains relatively still.

1. Work out how you breathe – lie in a comfortable position with pillows under your head and knees. Place your hands on the top of your tummy and on your chest. Watch and feel which of your hands moves the most as you breathe in and out. This will help you understand which part of your lungs you use the most.
2. People with hyperventilation often breathe incorrectly. Instead of using their diaphragm they use their upper chest muscles, and tend to breath faster and shallower, with occasional deeper breaths.
3. To breathe correctly, sit in a comfortable arm chair or lie on your bed and ensure you are as relaxed as possible. It is important to release any tension from your neck and shoulders before you start.
4. Place your hands on your stomach and chest wall as before.
5. Focus you thoughts on breathing the air towards your stomach, filling your lungs from the bottom upwards. You should feel your stomach rise under your hand. *Ensure that your breath size and rate does not increase as you practise this.*
6. Try to add a pause at the end of each breath.
7. Hold your breath for a couple of seconds before breathing in again ensuring your pattern of breathing remains smooth and calm.
8. You should practice this way of breathing for **10-15 minutes, 3 times a day.**

During these exercises you may feel that you are hungry for air – this sensation is perfectly normal and is as a result of the levels of carbon dioxide increasing to a more normal level within your lungs and bloodstream. As you continue to practice your breathing you will notice this sensation diminish. If you feel your symptoms return then concentrate on your breathing pattern again, and try using these exercises again. This should help with some of your symptoms.

### Hyperventilation Syndrome:

This short book talks about the syndrome using straightforward understandable language

Book: *Hyperventilation Syndrome: Breathing Pattern Disorders and How to Overcome Them* by Dinah Bradley. Publisher: [Kyle Cathie](#) Year: 2007 ISBN:1856267504

**This information leaflet has been reviewed and approved by the Audiology Patient Panel. If you would like to get involved, please leave your contact details with a member of the reception staff.**



If you require this leaflet in another format for example LARGE PRINT, Audio format or another language, please ask your audiologist, a member of reception, or contact the department

[Document History](#)

**Authors:** Audiology Department **Department:** Audiology Department, Hinchingbrooke Hospital, Hinchingbrooke Park, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE29 6NT. [www.hinchingbrooke.nhs.uk/page/our-services/audiology](http://www.hinchingbrooke.nhs.uk/page/our-services/audiology)

**Contact number:** 01480 847465 **Publish/Review date:** May 2013/April 2020



This leaflet is printed on recycled paper.