

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Patient Education: Side Effect and Symptom Management Series



Diaphragmatic (di uh frag MAT ik) **breathing** is a type of relaxation breathing that uses the diaphragm. The diaphragm is the muscle that is below the ribs and above the stomach. In this type of breathing, the diaphragm causes the stomach, instead of the chest, to rise and fall. When the lungs fill with air, the diaphragm pushes down, and the stomach will rise (move forward). When the lungs empty the air, the diaphragm moves back up, and the stomach will fall (move back in). The result is slow, even and deep breathing.

Benefits of Diaphragmatic Breathing

- Decrease pain
- Decrease muscle tension
- Help with heart rate
- Decrease stress
- Decrease anxiety
- Slow down breathing

How to Breathe with the Diaphragm

1. Get into a comfortable position. You may stand, sit or lay down on your back.
2. Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach.

The hand on your chest should stay still. The hand on your stomach will allow you to feel your stomach rise and fall as you breathe.



Hand position for Diaphragmatic Breathing

3. Breathe in through your nose if you can for 3-5 seconds, or as long as you are comfortable. Allow your stomach to rise as the air enters your lungs.
4. Breathe out through your mouth if you can for 3-5 seconds, or as long as you are comfortable. Allow your stomach to fall as the air leaves your lungs.
5. Repeat each step until your body feels relaxed.

Helpful Hints

- Never hold your breath or gasp for air.
- Use the second hand on the clock as a visual cue.
- Focus on exhaling for more relaxation.
- If you feel dizzy, return to your normal breathing.

📞 **Call your UNC Recreational Therapy and Child Life team member if you have any questions.**

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