



BELLY BREATHING FOR KIDS



About Breathing

The purpose of breathing is to take oxygen into the body and to get rid of carbon dioxide, which is a waste product. Breathing takes place through movement of the lungs. Underneath the lungs is a sheet of muscle called the diaphragm. The **diaphragm**, together with the **inter-costal muscles** which are found between the ribs, control the way in which the lungs expand (get bigger) and contract (get smaller).

Stress and Breathing

Breathing patterns change in times of stress. Breaths become rapid and shallow and the chest, rather than the diaphragm, is used to move air in and out of the lungs. This style of breathing is not helpful to the body and makes the symptoms of stress last for longer.

Controlled (Belly) Breathing

When we think about the way in which we are breathing, we can shift from an unhelpful style to a helpful one, allowing the body to switch into a restful state and the brain to deal with difficult emotions. This is done by taking breaths in through the nose in a slow, gentle way and by using the diaphragm rather than the chest to move the lungs.

How to teach children to Belly Breathe

Learning how to Belly Breathe can be fun:

Bubbles

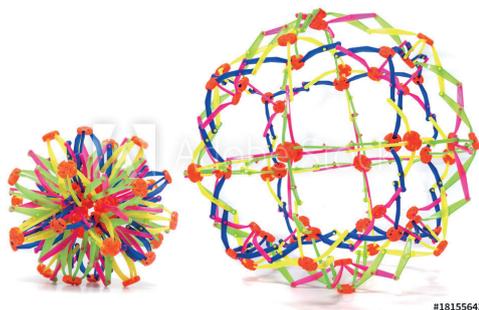
Most children love blowing bubbles. Give them a bubble wand (under supervision) and encourage them to take a long, slow breath in (pushing out the tummy so it swells) and then gently blow the breath out through the lips, making sure their tummy gets smaller at the same time. The magic of watching a bubble grow is amazing and a great reward for learning how to breathe this way.

NOTE: to reduce the risk of transmitting possible coronavirus, do this activity outside.



Breathing Buddy

Ask the child to lie down on their back. Place a cuddly toy on their tummy (the navel area). Ask them to breathe in, making sure their tummy swells. This will make the toy go up. They must then breathe out slowly through the mouth so that the tummy gets smaller and the toy goes down. Repeat for as long as the child is happy to practise the technique.



Hoberman Sphere (breathing ball)

This clever toy is great for older kids as it provides a visual reference for how the tummy should get bigger on the 'in' breath, and smaller on the 'out' breath. If you do not wish to buy a sphere then use the hands instead (['Breathing Ball Breath – Learning Tree Yoga'](#) from Youtube).



Mindful Breathing Exercise for Teens

- Find a **quiet place** where you will not be disturbed.
- Sit or stand comfortably.
- Make sure your **feet are flat on the ground** (having no shoes or socks on may help).
- Think about the **sensation** this brings (secure and 'grounded').
- Close** your eyes.
- Pay attention** as you breathe in slowly. Imagine the **journey** of the air as it enters your body and travels to your lungs. Push your tummy **out** as your lungs fill with air.
- Hold** the breath for a moment.
- Breathe out slowly** through a slightly open mouth and imagine you are blowing a feather. Feel the tummy go **in** as the air leaves the lungs and is released carefully.
- With each breath out, feel your body become **soft** as **tension leaves**.
- Enjoy the steady **rhythm** of controlled breathing and continue to focus on the movement of the tummy as it goes in and out.
- Repeat** for several minutes or as long as it feels right.

NOTE: when this skill is mastered, take it further by counting in your head as you breathe in and out. There are different combinations for this technique, for example 4 7 8. This means: inhale (breathe in) slowly to the count of 4, hold the breath for a count of 7, exhale (breathe out) for a count of 8.

Tips for success:

- Practice belly breathing **every day**.
- Practice when the child is already **calm** and **receptive**
- Link it to **other routine activities** (ie after brushing teeth at bedtime).
- Make it a **whole family** activity to reduce stress in the household.
- Motivate by using **stickers**.
- Help the child learn to **identify** when they become **stressed** and remind them to belly breathe.
- Reward** by giving high fives and praise.
- Help them understand that belly breathing is an **invisible** and **powerful tool** to help them in life, even when they are older.



About hyperventilation

Hyperventilation is not the same as belly breathing. When someone hyperventilates they breathe unnaturally fast and too deeply, resulting in unpleasant symptoms (fast heart rate, dizziness or feeling faint, trembling, sweating, dry mouth, tingling in hands and feet, cramps).

A common trigger for hyperventilation is anxiety or stress. Teaching children how to spot when they are getting stressed and to act quickly and consciously control their breathing, will therefore reduce the risk of hyperventilation amongst other things.

Further information about breathing techniques:

[Coping Skills for Kids](#)

[The Inspired Treehouse](#)

[Ambitious About Autism](#)

[Additude](#)

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