

Triggers and Contributing Factors

Exercise, stress, and cold air commonly trigger Dysfunctional Breathing (DB). Some medical conditions like nasal congestion, asthma, reflux, depression and anxiety make DB worse. Your medical care team will ask about triggers and other conditions to help you manage your DB.

Dysfunctional Breathing (DB) and Asthma

DB is often mistaken as asthma since it has similar symptoms and triggers. However, DB is a different condition and usually does not fully respond to asthma treatment. DB can occur in patients with or without asthma. DB can occur even when your asthma is well-controlled.

Breathing Well

With treatment, Dysfunctional Breathing (DB) can improve and you can return to normal activities. Practicing 'breathing well' exercises is key to your recovery. Successful DB recovery occurs when symptoms, underlying conditions, and triggers are all addressed. You may be referred to other therapists and health care providers for assessment and support. Develop a DB management plan together with your health care team.

Alberta Children's Hospital

Asthma Clinic


Find out
more about
'Breathing
Well' here



Breathing Well

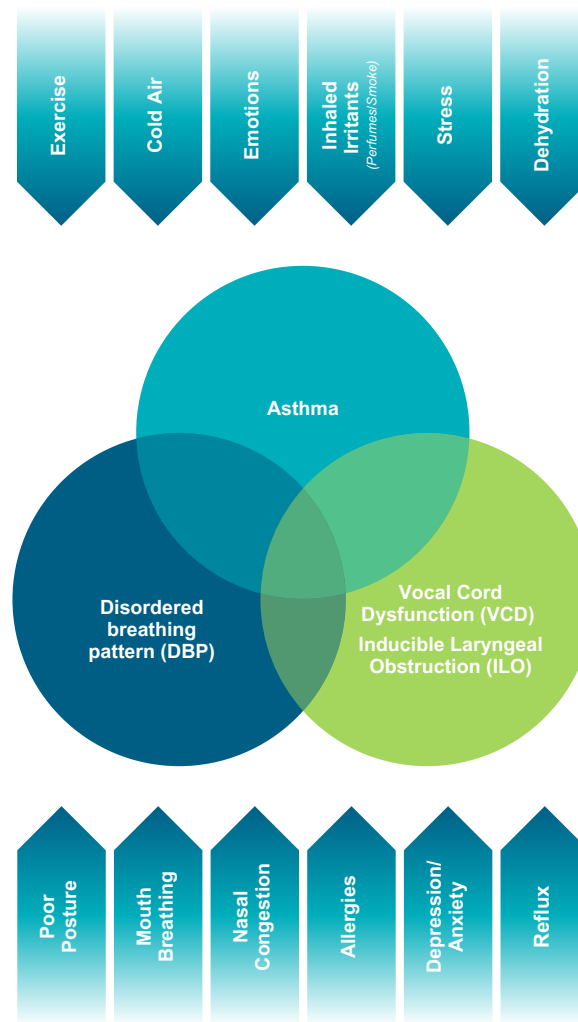
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What is Dysfunctional Breathing?

Dysfunctional breathing (DB) is a common cause of 'breathlessness' attacks. These episodes may begin suddenly and can be very frightening. You may experience chest or throat tightening or feel unable to take a breath in. Some people also have noisy breathing, voice changes, coughing, and feel panicky. Untreated DB may prevent your participation in every day activities. Although especially common in adolescence, DB can occur at any age.

There are different types of DB. You may experience 'Disordered Breathing Patterns' where your breathing rate or way of breathing changes when exposed to a trigger. Your breathing may become too fast or too shallow. Sometimes your chest may not expand well or you may breath only through your mouth. Some people have a type of DB known as 'Vocal Cord Dysfunction' (VCD) or 'Inducible Laryngeal Obstruction' (ILO) that occurs when the vocal cords (*larynx*) or nearby muscles squeeze together causing a feeling of breathlessness. Normally, when you breathe in, your vocal cords open like curtains so air flows into your lungs. With VCD, your vocal cords open only a little. Since vocal cords are soft and flexible, some air gets through but it is much harder to breathe and some people say it "feels like I'm breathing through a straw."



DB Management or 'Breathing Well'

BREATH RETRAINING

RECOVERY BREATHING

NASAL CARE

MEDITATION/MINDFULNESS

VOICE COACHING

HYDRATION

ASTHMA CONTROL

MANAGE STRESS

TREAT ACID REFLUX

POSTURE & STRETCHING

EVENT JOURNAL/VIDEO

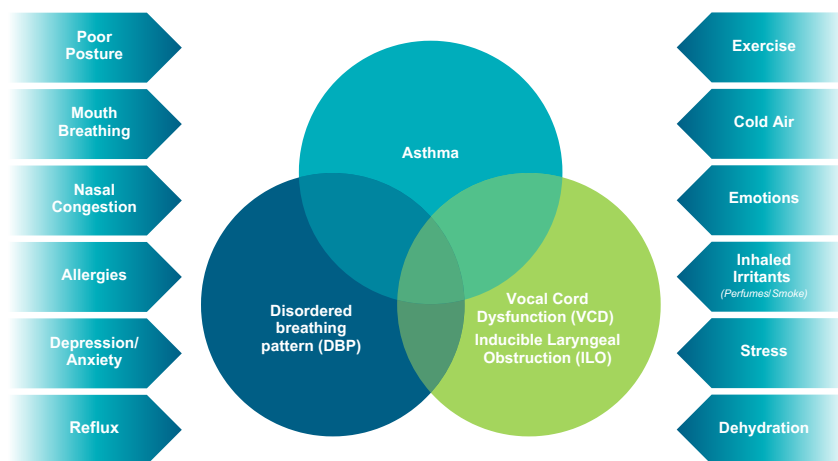
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Managing Dysfunctional Breathing

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RECOVERY BREATHING

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MEDITATION/MINDFULNESS

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Managing DB

With treatment, DB can improve and you can return to normal activities. Practicing 'breathing well' exercises is key to your recovery. Successful DB recovery occurs when symptoms, underlying conditions, and triggers are all addressed. You may be referred to other therapists and health care providers for assessment and support. Develop a DB management plan together with your health care team.

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ACTION PLAN

Practice 'Breathing Well'

- ☐ Posture Awareness

- ☐ Head Bob

- ☐ Belly Breathing

- ☐ Sniffing

- ☐ Yawning

- ☐ Bring it Together

- ☐ Other

Treat Aggravating Conditions

- ☐ Nasal Saline Rinse

- ☐ Antihistamine

- ☐ Nasal Corticosteroid Spray

- ☐ Anti-reflux

Lifestyle Ideas

- ☐ Hydration
- ☐ Fitness Conditioning
- ☐ Meditation/Mindfulness
- ☐ Yoga
- ☐ Massage
- ☐ Counselling
- ☐ Voice Coaching
- ☐ Other

My Triggers

- ☐ Exercise
- ☐ Emotions
- ☐ Stress
- ☐ Perfume/Strong Smells
- ☐ Smoke
- ☐ Cold Air
- ☐ Allergies
- ☐ Dehydration

Control Asthma

- ☐ Use my Asthma Action Plan

Track Progress

- ☐ Event Diary*
- ☐ Event Video Recording*

**bring to next appointment*

Notes & Next Visit Information:

Find out
more about
'Breathing
Well' here



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COMPONENTS AND TECHNIQUES

Components

Posture ('stand or sit tall and relaxed')

- Good posture and balanced use of breathing muscles is critical.
- Posture problems may worsen breathing problems.
- Longstanding breathing problems (like asthma) lead to posture-related breathing problems.
- Specific activities (i.e. certain exercises, sitting) or tension/stress, may worsen posture, contributing to breathlessness events.
- Increased posture awareness and practice helps stabilize and regain control of critical muscles.
- Consider complementary therapies that support posture and breath control such as massage, physiotherapy, chiropractic, yoga, singing, laughter therapy, or meditation.

See Posture Awareness

Air Flow ('use your nose')

- Breathing through both your nose and mouth is critical.
- Practice taking deep breaths in and out first through only your mouth, then through only your nose.
- Practice nose breathing for a minute at a time. If this is too hard, start with a shorter time, and increase the time as you become more comfortable.
- Use nasal saline rinses (*at least once daily*)
- Consider an over the counter antihistamine (if allergies are a factor)
- Your doctor may prescribe a nasal corticosteroid spray to use daily.

See Head Bob

Breath Mechanics ('use your belly')

- More efficient breathing is achieved when you activate and use your abdomen during breathing.
- This drops your diaphragm, increasing the space for air.

See Belly Breathing

Techniques

Posture Awareness

- Practice being self-aware of your posture and breath at various times in a day.
- Try family competitions to 'catch' each other slouching.
- Set a timer for a minute and practice for 'perfect posture' in various settings (while on your device, while running or playing a sport, during a meal...)

Head Bob

- Blow your nose.
- Breathe in through your nose.
- Plug your nose.
- Hold your breath and bob your head until you are 'air hungry' (out of breath).
- Stop plugging your nose, take a deep breath in.
- Most people notice it is now easier to breathe through their nose.

Belly Breathing

- Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your belly.
- Take several normal breaths in then out.
- Notice which hand moves more—chest or belly?
- The goal is for the belly to move while the chest stays calm.
- If belly breathing while sitting is difficult, try lying down.
- Try adding a weight such as a stuffy, beanbag, phone or even your hand.

Bring it Together

(stand or sit tall and relaxed, use your nose, use your belly)

- Set aside time every day to focus on 'Better Breathing' until your episodes are improved.
- 'If in doubt, breathe out.'
- Breath awareness can help everyone and may improve concentration, relaxation, and sports performance.
- Practice, Practice, Practice, to make this your normal way of breathing.

Sniffing

- Take three short sniffs in, using belly breathing.
- Visualize the sniffs pushing out the vocal cords.

Yawning

- Make a giant yawn.
- While yawning, concentrate on keeping your tongue on the floor of your mouth

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BREATHLESSNESS QUESTIONNAIRE

*Some young people experiencing breathlessness events ('attacks') describe the symptoms below.
Check 'Yes' if a statement seems true to your experiences.*

| About my Breathing Events... | Yes | No | Not Sure | Notes |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| I usually feel my symptoms in my throat and/or upper chest | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| My breathlessness is usually worse when breathing in compared to breathing out | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| I sometimes feel like I can't get a breath past a certain point in my throat/upper chest because it feels tight or blocked | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| I sometimes feel an ache or itch in my throat or like something is stuck in my throat that I cannot clear | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| My breathing can be noisy | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| My voice sometimes changes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| My events usually start very suddenly | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| My reliever inhaler sometimes takes too long to work or does not work very well | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| I sometimes feel lightheaded or dizzy | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| I sometimes feel numbness or tingling in my hands, feet or lips | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| I know specific triggers that cause my attacks <i>If yes, some triggers are:</i> <hr/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| I sometimes cannot do usual activities because of these attacks <i>If yes, things I cannot do are:</i> <hr/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |

Notes or other details my health care team should know:

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EVENT DIARY

| Date & Time | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Y N | Y N | Y N | Y N | Y N |
| My symptoms occurred most in my throat/upper chest | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> |
| My symptoms were worse with breathing in compared to breathing out | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> |
| My throat/upper chest felt "tight" or "blocked" | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> |
| I felt like something was stuck in my throat | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> |
| My breathing was noisy | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> |
| My voice changed | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> |
| My symptoms began very suddenly | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> |
| I felt lightheaded or dizzy | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> |
| I had numbness or tingling in my feet, hands or lips | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> |
| Comments <i>(ie. triggers, activity, what I tried, what helped etc.)</i> | | | | | |

Remember to bring your video recording to your next appointment.

