

What Is 'Good' Breathing?

Breathing well is not about taking bigger breaths. In fact, optimal breathing is usually quiet, gentle, with very little effort. When breathing is light, low, and slow, the body can work more efficiently and feel calmer and more balanced.

What Does 'Good' Breathing Mean?

Good breathing supports the body's natural systems rather than pushing against them. It is:

-Nasal -Light -Low -Slow

This type of breathing helps maintain the right balance of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the body, which is essential for oxygen (O₂) to be delivered effectively to muscles, organs, and the brain.

Breathing Light: Keeping The Breath Gentle

Light breathing means taking in only the air the body needs, rather than taking large or forceful breaths. At rest, breathing should be quiet and barely noticeable. Your body uses the levels of CO₂ in your bloodstream to control your breathing.

When breathing is heavy, too much CO₂ is blown off, which affects the chemical balance of the blood. This is known as hypocapnia. This causes O₂ to stay "stuck" to your hemoglobin (the Bohr Effect) instead of being released to your tissues. It also causes blood vessels to narrow, causes nerves and muscles to function poorly, affects how the gut works, causes sensory disturbances, brain fog and fatigue.

Gentle breathing helps the body use oxygen more efficiently and can reduce feelings of breathlessness, tension, and anxiety.

Optimal breathing is efficient rather than effortful.

Breathing Low: Using The Diaphragm

Your diaphragm is the big muscle that separates your thorax from your abdomen. It is designed to work all day to keep you breathing. Your upper chest muscles are "turbo boosters" for emergencies and exercise.

Good breathing involves gentle movement in the lower ribs and upper abdomen, not the

upper chest. When breathing is high and chest-based, it often becomes faster and more tense; it can lead to aching shoulders, head and neck pain.

Low breathing:

- Encourages relaxation
- Reduces strain on the neck and shoulders
- Supports better posture
- Improves Oxygen uptake

At rest, breathing should feel easy and relaxed, with little visible movement.

Breathing Slow: Helping Nervous System Balance

Slow breathing means allowing the breath to move at a natural, unhurried pace. It is not about holding the breath or forcing it to slow down, but about letting the breath settle on its own. At rest you should take about 8-12 breaths per minute.

When breathing is fast it triggers the fight, flight or freeze (sympathetic) nervous system, the body becomes over-alert and tense. Slower breathing triggers the rest, digest and recover (parasympathetic) nervous system, this supports steadier heart rhythms, improved oxygen delivery, and a calmer response to stress.

Over time, slow breathing can improve breathing comfort during rest and activity, helping daily activities feel easier and less demanding.

The Role Of The Nose (See Leaflet 'Why Breathing Through the Nose Matters')

Good breathing happens using the nose. Nose breathing naturally slows the breath, filters and warms the air, and supports better oxygen use. It utilises the gas Nitric Oxide which opens the airways and blood vessels and helps kill germs.

Correct Tongue Position

Tongue position plays a simple but important role in breathing and posture.

Your tongue should:

- Rest gently against the roof of the mouth.
- The tip of the tongue should sit just behind the upper front teeth.
- The sides should lift up to create a hammock.
- The lips should be closed, with teeth slightly apart and the jaw relaxed.

This position supports nose breathing, helps keep the airway open, and encourages good head and neck alignment. Over time, it can make breathing feel more natural and relaxed.

Light, Low, And Slow In Daily Life

Good breathing can be practised whilst resting, sitting, walking, or exercising.

Helpful habits include:

- Breathing quietly through the nose.
- Avoiding sighing or taking big breaths.
- Extending the exhale.
- Keeping the shoulders and tummy relaxed.
- Maintaining gentle tongue contact with the roof of the mouth.

It may feel challenging at first to keep breathing light and through the nose, but this improves with practice.

Small Changes, Lasting Benefits

Good breathing is not about control or force. It is about allowing the body to return to a more natural breathing pattern.

With time, light, low, and slow breathing can support:

- Improved comfort during movement
- Better sleep
- Calmer breathing under stress
- Improved overall wellbeing

When To Seek Advice

If breathing symptoms are new, severe, or worsening, it's important to seek medical advice to rule out other causes and once these have been excluded, breathing retraining can be a useful and safe way to reduce symptoms and improve overall wellbeing.