

Why Breathing Through the Nose Matters

The nose is designed for breathing. Mouth breathing is useful at times, such as during heavy exertion, but when it becomes a habit it can lead to problems.

What The Nose Does For Breathing

The nose has several important roles:

- It warms the air before it reaches the lungs.
- It filters out dust, pollen, and other particles.
- It adds moisture to the air, helping protect the airways.
- It encourages the diaphragm to work.
- It encourages slower, calmer breathing, which helps maintain the right balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the body.
- It utilises the gas Nitric Oxide, which is produced in the nasal passages and sinuses. This gas helps open up blood vessels and the airways which helps oxygen uptake, and it helps kill germs so it supports your immune system.

Common Signs Of Mouth Breathing

Many people breathe through their mouth without realising it, especially during sleep or gentle activity. Signs can include:

- Having a dry mouth or sore throat
- Snoring
- Poor sleep quality
- Frequent sighing or heavy breathing
- Feeling breathless at rest or during light exercise

Nose Breathing During Activity

When people feel short of breath, the instinct is often to open the mouth and take bigger breaths. This can actually make exercising feel harder.

Breathing through the nose during walking or gentle exercise:

- Slows breathing naturally.
- Encourages the diaphragm to work.
- Encourages a more relaxed breathing pattern.
- Helps oxygen uptake.

At first this may feel challenging, but with practice it becomes easier.

Helping The Nose Work Better

If you don't use your nose to breathe it can become stuffed up and this makes breathing through it feel difficult. Simple steps can help:

- Gently closing the mouth at rest.
- Breathing quietly and lightly through the nose.
- Keeping lips together without clenching.
- Having your tongue at the top of your mouth.
- Improving posture so the diaphragm and ribs can move freely.

Practising nose breathing for short periods each day can help retrain the breathing pattern.

There are anatomical reasons why you might not be able to breathe through your nose. Try this unblocking technique and if this still does not help you breathe through your nose after trying for a while consider getting an assessment of your nasal passages. This technique is also useful if you have a cold and your nose is blocked.

Nose Unblocking Technique

- Take a small, silent breath in and a small, silent breath out through your nose.
- Pinch your nose with your fingers to hold your breath.
- Gently nod your head up and down (or sway your body) while holding the breath. Keep holding until you have a moderate feeling of needing to breathe.
- When you resume breathing, do so only through your nose.
- After resuming your breathing, your first breath will usually be bigger than normal. Make sure that you calm your breathing as soon as possible, if you cannot, you have held your breath for too long.
- Rest for about a minute.
- Repeat this exercise five or six times until the nose is unblocked.