



baywater
HEALTHCARE

.....

LIVING WITH COPD
HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR
BREATHING BY SINGING

.....

Why singing can improve your breathing

INTRODUCTION

COPD stands for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. It is a term that is used to describe a number of conditions including emphysema and chronic bronchitis. If you have COPD, you may have one or more of these conditions.

You are not alone. It is estimated that there are 3 million people in the UK living with COPD¹. It is a condition which causes inflammation of the airways and the air sacs in your lungs become damaged. This is what causes your airways to become narrower and is why those living with COPD struggle to breathe in and out. You can often appear breathless when taking part in light exercise or climbing a set of stairs.

Although there is no cure for COPD, there are lots of treatments available to help you manage your condition, improve your symptoms and live an active life.

If you suffer from COPD you will actually become more breathless, the less active you are. The thought of exercise can seem daunting, but tackling breathlessness head-on can improve quality of life by regularly opening up your airways and increasing mobility. When we talk about exercise, we mean exercising the lungs and this can involve many forms of active movement such as walking, jogging or cycling. However, an important factor for someone with COPD is the ability to control breathlessness and understanding the specific exercises that will improve lung function – in other words make your lungs work better and more efficiently.

At Baywater Healthcare, our main focus is providing quality patient care and doing our utmost to help people. Many of the people we care for suffer from respiratory problems; therefore we wanted to promote a beneficial activity that is not only fun, but accessible to all. And so, we chose singing!

WHY SINGING?

Singing makes us feel good for a variety of reasons. There are a number of physical and mental benefits. In terms of the physical benefits, when we're singing we're exercising the lungs, heart, upper and lower body. Singing itself and the exercise involved releases the endorphins that leave us feeling rewarded and boosts our self-confidence.

Not only is singing a fun way to practice deep breathing exercises and put lung capacity to the test, it is also a great excuse to get people together.

Whether you know someone with COPD, suffer from the condition yourself or you're interested in helping someone feel better about their condition, singing not only helps maximise lung capacity but is one way to combat the negative psychological effects that COPD can have.

To help take control of breathing, Baywater Healthcare has produced this useful step-by-step guide, in partnership with professional vocal coach, Phaedra Brickwood. It will help people exercise their lungs and begin to understand specific breathing controls that may help to manage breathlessness. We want to encourage COPD sufferers to get active, but in a way that suits them, whether that is by encouraging someone to practice breathing exercises more often or even join a singing class.

How to sing properly and diaphragmatic breathing

The diaphragmatic breathing techniques involved in singing are the most important techniques for people who suffer from COPD and it does require some practice to get to grips with the correct exercises. However, knowledge is key and once you take control of your breathing, you will start to reap the rewards.

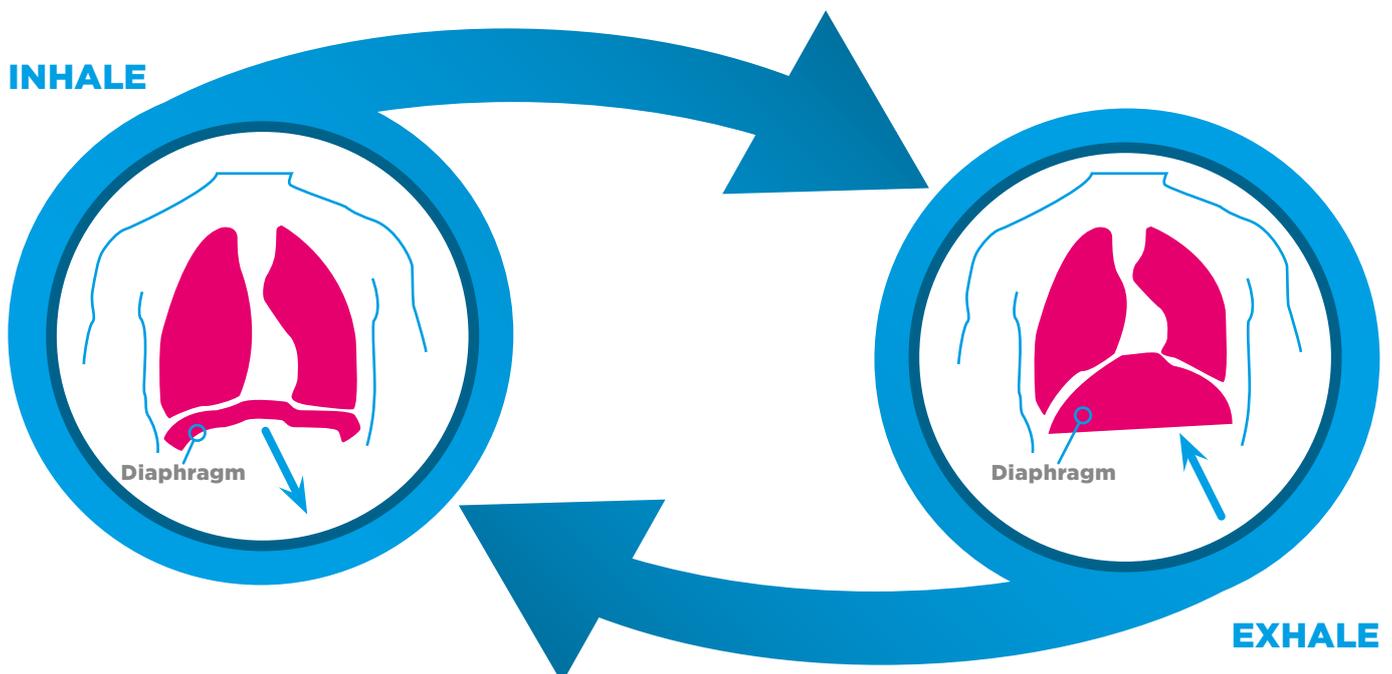
A BIT ABOUT DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

When we're born, this type of breathing comes naturally to us. It is only when we grow older and our lifestyles change that we may forget how to make best use of the diaphragm. Of course, those who regularly take part in high-intensity exercise will be well rehearsed at contracting their diaphragm to increase air flow, yet may not be completely aware of the role the diaphragm plays.

Diaphragmatic breathing is led by contracting and relaxing the huge, dome-shaped muscle that sits below the rib cage. Using the diaphragm enables us to allow more air into the lungs when we inhale. When we exhale, the muscle relaxes allowing you to empty the lungs and repeat the pattern again.

Fully emptying the lungs is often where COPD sufferers struggle and sometimes overcompensate by doing short gasps to get more air into and out of the lungs. This is where the condition can leave people feeling short of breath very quickly and in some cases can bring on hyperventilation.

Singing and practicing the correct diaphragmatic breathing exercises will help those living with the condition to understand the importance of the diaphragm and how to optimise lung capacity. Taking deeper, longer breaths ultimately encourages a more balanced air flow in and out of the lungs.





Getting your body ready to sing

Although the most important part of singing for COPD sufferers is to exercise the lungs, you must ensure that the whole body is ready to sing in order to maximise the techniques you're about to learn. Before you even make a sound you should be warming the body up in preparation for what you are about to do. After all it's not just your lungs that are going to be doing all the work, but your diaphragm, vocal cords and abdominal muscles.

Here are Phaedra's top tips on preparing your body for singing and practicing the correct diaphragmatic breathing exercises to maintain your lung capacity:

1. GET YOUR POSTURE RIGHT

The way you stand or sit is most important for you to gain the best airflow through your lungs.

Generally, you should be nice and relaxed from the knees upwards. As long as you have a strong stance, you'll avoid swaying around!

- If standing, feet should be shoulder width apart to give you a strong grounding
- Keep the knees flexed so that you have some spring in your step
- Hips should be tucked in
- Back straight, even if sitting down
- Chest upright
- Shoulders should be relaxed
- Head in neutral position & arms by your side.

2. RELAX YOUR FACE

We carry a lot of tension in our face and it's time to let it go. The purpose of these exercises are to give the air the best possible chance of travelling smoothly through your lips and into the air passages to gain deeper, more efficient breathing. Here's how to do it:

CHEEKS

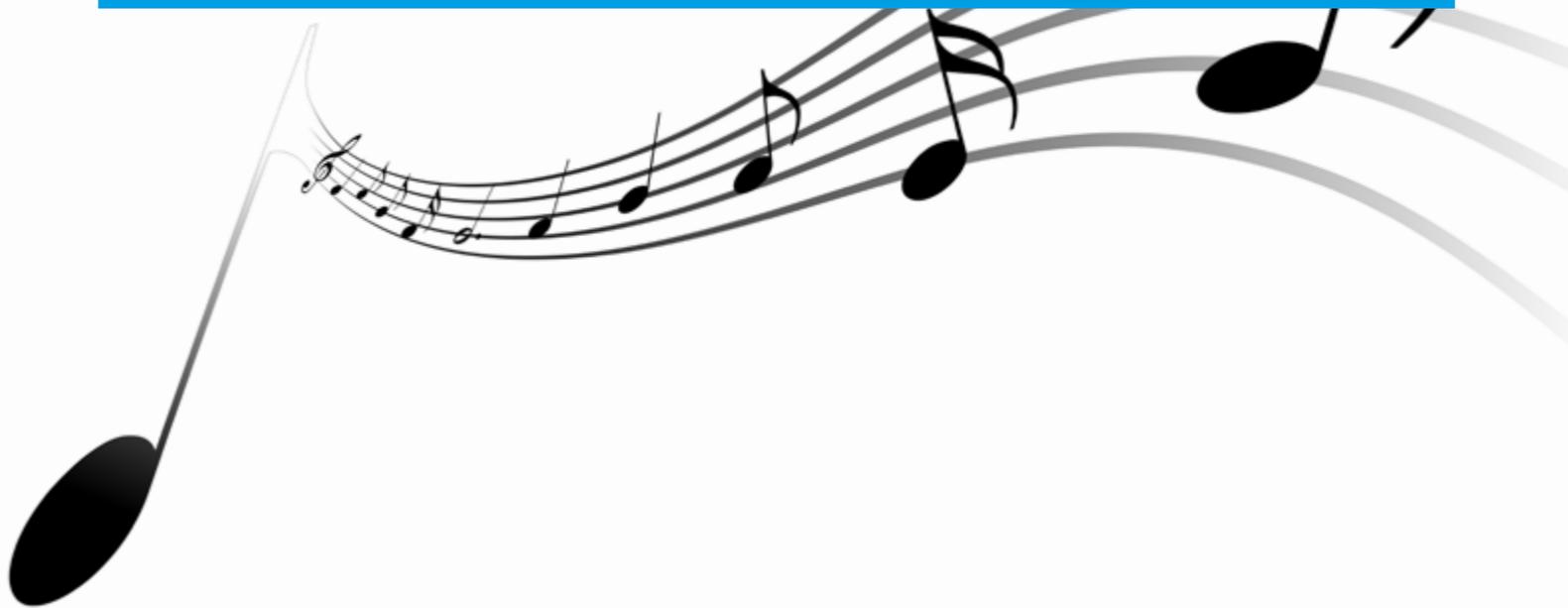
- Blow outwards and push the cheeks out
- Scrunch the face up and then stick your tongue out (it sounds mad, but the sillier the face, the better)
- Give your face a massage – rub all the way around your face to loosen it up including your cheekbones, eyebrows and jaw
- Repeat each of these three or four times.

JAW

- Open your mouth – this is where your voice comes out so open the mouth wide and drop the jaw
- Let your tongue drop down with the jaw and hold for 3-4 seconds. As strange as this feels, repeat until your jaw feels loose but not so much that it aches!

LIP TRILLS

- To perform a lip trill, simply create a raspberry sound by loosely placing your lips together and breathing to create a sound
- Repeat three or four times for a few seconds just to warm the mouth up.



3. SINGING FROM THE DIAPHRAGM

The most crucial part of the singing which will help you fill your lungs properly.

When you're singing, you will need to sing from the diaphragm. When learning these techniques it is essential to gradually build up the length and depth of breaths as your diaphragm strengthens. The diaphragm is like any other muscle, it needs regular exercise in order to improve its strength:

- Stand up or sit up straight and place your hands lightly on your stomach
- Concentrate on breathing using the diaphragm, not the chest
- Inhale. When you breathe in, you should feel the stomach rise as the lungs fill up from the bottom
- Try to visualise the lungs filling and emptying to help you perform deep breathing
- Once you have inhaled to full capacity and as deeply as is possible, exhale (breathe out) slowly and let the stomach fall naturally as you exhale
- If you're feeling adventurous, you can try this exercise while lying down on the floor for maximum effect
- If you have been practising these exercises regularly and feel comfortable, you may wish to place a small weight on the stomach, such as a small book, to see if you are breathing deeply enough*
- You should see the book rise and fall as you inhale and exhale which will tell you that you are breathing from the diaphragm.

*please do not try this until you have been practising the exercises from a standing/sitting position regularly for 2-3 weeks. Increased strength will only come once you have built up capacity and the length and depth of your breaths. Placing the hand on the stomach in the first few weeks will tell you if breaths are deep enough as your hand will rise and fall.

Breathing exercises to help increase lung capacity

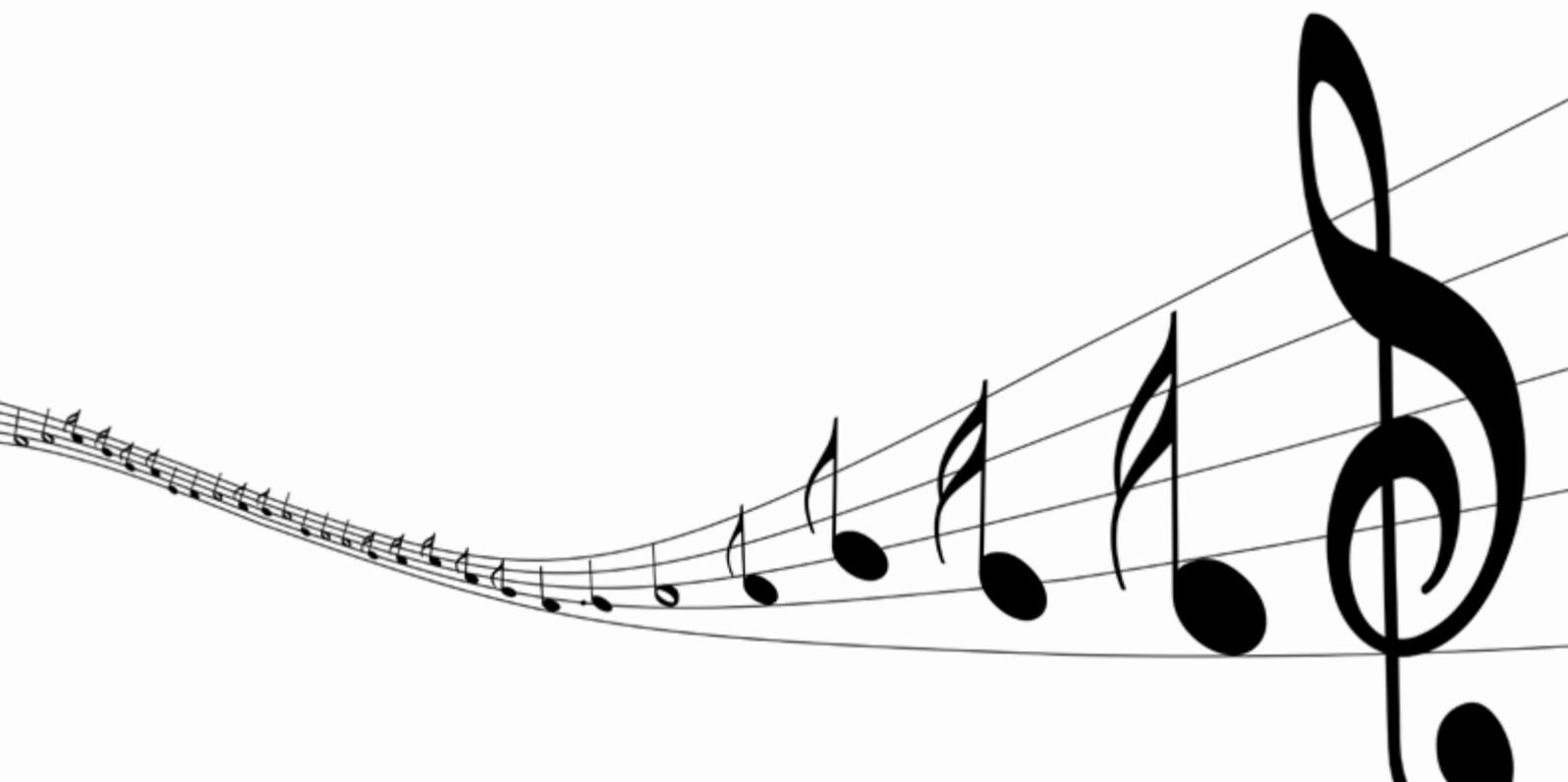
Here are some other simple breathing exercises to get your lungs primed for singing that any professional vocal coach will take through before singing. Whether you want to regularly sing or not, you can improve your deep breathing by completing these exercises three or four times per week:

BREATHING EXERCISE 1 (emptying the lungs)

- Take a nice deep breath by inhaling air through the nose only
- Once you have inhaled, exhale as slowly as possible
- When you exhale, vocalise the breath with a 'tffff' sound and you should feel your diaphragm pushing out the air
- Try and hold your exhalation for as long as possible – 15 seconds is normally a good length to aim for but don't worry if you can't do this. Your ability will increase over time
- Keep repeating this simple exercise to improve the depth of your breathing and ability to empty the lung.

BREATHING EXERCISE 2

- Follow the same steps as in the first breathing exercise but this time when you inhale, try to hold the breath for 3-4 seconds and then exhale. Don't worry if you can't hold your breath for this long. Remember to go at your own pace in accordance with your own condition
- When you exhale, aim to push out as much air as possible but this time breathe out as slowly as you can until you have emptied your lungs
- If you start to feel breathless or find yourself gasping, then stop and decrease the length of the breath when exhaling. Only do what you feel comfortable with and then gradually increase the length of the exhalation.



The best songs to sing for diaphragmatic breathing

Try some of these songs recommended by professional vocal coach, Phaedra Brickwood, to put the breathing techniques you've learnt into practice. Remember to always warm up!

Phaedra Brickwood explains:

Whilst Christmas carolling is a great time to start incorporating the breathing exercises you've learnt into singing, I've also included below a list of 'everyday' songs that will not only put your lungs to the test but by singing these songs as part of a group, will help boost your morale.

These songs have been carefully chosen because of the varying speeds and length of phrases within each of them. I am going to take you through some example songs and teach you how to incorporate breathing controls, but as a general rule you should start with the slower songs. The slower songs will help you to manage deep breaths and maximise the amount of air intake. Once you have built up some strength, try the quicker songs which will challenge you take in the same amount of air but in a shorter space of time. Once you have mastered the faster songs, you have a good ability to control your breathing.

CHRISTMAS SONGS

- Ding Dong Merrily On High
- White Christmas (I'm dreaming of a)
- Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas
- Jingle Bell Rock
- Silent Night
- Hark the Herald
- Dona Nobis - Traditional.



EVERYDAY SONGS:

- ABC - Jackson 5
- Walking on Sunshine - Katrina & The Waves
- You Got the Love - Florence & The Machine
- With a Little Help from My Friends - The Beatles
- Thank You For The Music - Abba
- 9 to 5 - Dolly Parton
- I'm Still Standing - Elton John
- Can You Feel the Love Tonight - Elton John (Lion King)
- A Dream Is A Wish Your Heart Makes - composed by Mack David, Al Hoffman and Jerry Livingston for the Walt Disney 1950 film "Cinderella".
- Jolene - Dolly Parton.



So these are a handful of songs I would recommend to try. You may find some of these tricky to begin with when it comes to practicing your breathing exercises, but they have been chosen specifically because of the range of verses and varying pace.

Before trying these songs, I want to show how you can use a simple song such as Happy Birthday to really test your lung capacity. This is done by joining phrases together and moving the point at which you inhale. In my examples I will use / to signify a breath and this is when you should inhaling.

A phrase is when you start to make a sound with your voice; the aim is to make that sound travel as smoothly as possible without any pauses. When you see a / this is where you are coming out of a phrase and starting a new breath cycle, so here you should have exhaled towards the end of the phrase and then be taking a deep breath in.

To show how you should be using singing to practice controlling your breathing and maximising lung capacity, I will provide a simple example which shows generally where people take their breaths during the song and an after example which is how I would advise you sing the song to maximise the use of the lungs. It is absolutely fine to start off by breathing on the points in the before examples and then try the after examples when you feel comfortable.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Before:

Happy Birthday to you /

Happy Birthday to you /

Happy Birthday dear whoever /

Happy Birthday to you!

After:

If a song is simple and has a lot of short phrases you want to try and push you breathing ability e.g:

Happy Birthday to you.....

Happy Birthday to you /

Happy Birthday dear (friend).....

Happy Birthday to you! /

If you find that this is too easy try to sing the whole song in one breath. Remember not to speed the song up otherwise you are defeating the point of the exercise.



Now, let's try applying this to a Christmas song:

DING DONG MERRILY ON HIGH

Before:

Ding dong merrily on high /

In heav'n the bells are ringing /

Ding dong! verily the sky

Is riv'n with angel singing /

Gloria / Hosanna in excelsis!

*Note: Some may even breath in the middle of the 'Gloria' run

After:

Ding dong merrily on high

In heav'n the bells are ringing /

Ding dong! verily the sky

Is riv'n with angel singing /

Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

Here, we've linked the first two phrases together before inhaling and starting a new breath cycle. If you want to challenge yourself and you've attempted this song a few times, try it without inhaling in the middle of the 'Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis' - this phrase is really going to push you to control your breathing.

And finally, let's put this into practice with an everyday song and a slightly more challenging song.

You will see from the list, I've chosen some faster-paced songs to help support the exercising of your lungs. 9 to 5 by Dolly Parton is a great one to do as it is quick and quite a challenge throughout.

9 TO 5

Before:

Tumble outta bed
And I stumble to the kitchen /
Pour myself a cup of ambition /
yawn and stretch
And try to come to life /
Jump in the shower
And the blood starts pumpin' /
Out on the street
The traffic starts jumpin' /
The folks like me on the job from 9 to 5

After:

Tumble outta bed
And I stumble to the kitchen
Pour myself a cup of ambition
yawn and stretch
And try to come to life /
Jump in the shower
And the blood starts pumpin'
Out on the street
The traffic starts jumpin'
The folks like me on the job from 9 to 5 /



Singing makes you feel better!

We're holding a group singing session in a residential home to teach people the specific breathing techniques involved in singing and generally to make people feel good about themselves.

Evidence suggests that COPD also has considerable psychological effects on sufferers, with 50% of patients experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression². Getting involved in regular group singing sessions provides both physical and mental benefits. Not only is it a simple, accessible way to practice diaphragmatic breathing exercises but the social interaction and singing itself promotes well-being to improve overall quality of life. Regularly participating in exercise or learning a new skill can leave us feeling a great sense of achievement and no matter what your lung capability is, breathing exercises of varying degrees may help achieve similar results.

³Researchers have proven that participating in regular singing sessions can improve quality of life. The benefits of diaphragmatic breathing involved in singing are also supported by initial studies which suggest that regular singing lessons can preserve and help to improve the lung function of patients.

Baywater Healthcare work to improve the lives of people with COPD. To find out about the singing for breathing campaign visit: www.baywater.co.uk

Thank you for reading!

¹NICE guidelines 2010

²Anxiety and depression in patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). A review. Mikkelsen et al (2004) Nordic Journal of Psychiatry Vol 58, No1, p65-70

³ Effects of singing classes on pulmonary function and quality of life on COPD patients Amanda Gimenes Boniha et al (2009) Int J Chron Obstruct Pulmon Dis 4, p1-8

BAYWATER HEALTHCARE

2 Millennium Gate
Westmere Drive
Crewe, Cheshire
CW1 6XB

Freephone: 0800 373580
Fax: 0800 214709
Email: healthuk@baywater.co.uk
Web: www.baywater.co.uk
Facebook: <http://on.fb.me/1xTD0nO>
LinkedIn: <http://linkd.in/1Fr8Zhs>
YouTube: <http://bit.ly/1rkWMYU>
 [@BaywaterHealth](https://twitter.com/BaywaterHealth)

**ENHANCING
LIVES
THROUGH
OUTSTANDING
HEALTHCARE**

