



Take a deep breath...

... and relax

Welcome to PhysioBiz, with healthcare advice and information you can trust and rely on, brought to you by the South African Society of Physiotherapy!

The first three weeks of lockdown were not that bad for many people – we felt we were doing something to fight the pandemic and help our country, and there was the novelty of being at home, having time to springclean and bingewatch and work on your children’s schoolwork. Then came the Banana Bread and Sourdough Weeks, and finally, finally, the Great Escape – three hours to exercise! – but by now, we’re so over it all, aren’t we.

Now that you’re walking or running regularly, you’re likely regaining condition that you may have lost couch-surfing your way through Level Five. But there’s an important aspect of condition which you could take some time to focus on now: lung capacity and resilience. “While we’re still learning all the ways this virus attacks, lungs do take a beating in many cases of COVID-19,” says Rogier van Bever Donker, President of the South African Society of Physiotherapy. “Having healthy and highly functional lungs is always a good idea, but it’s especially important now. Try to devote just ten to twenty minutes every day to breathing exercises.”

Two recommended exercises:

- **Belly breathing.**
Many of us make the mistake of thinking deep breathing involves expanding your upper body – your chest and ribs. But deep breathing happens from the diaphragm, that band of muscles between your ribs and your tummy area. It’s those muscles that pull downwards to draw air into your lungs.
Let your tummy muscles relax. Then breathe in deeply, with one hand placed on your stomach, just below the rib cage. Do you feel it? Do you see how your

tummy area expands? Now breathe in through your nose, trying to make the stomach rise even further. And breathe out. And in again. Each time, try to make your inhalation last longer, and to push out as much air as you comfortably can. (This is the kind of breathing that singers use.) Do this at least eight times, and try to increase the number by one or two a day for a week.

Keep an eye on your upper body: you should not be tensing up there. Roll your shoulders forward and backward to release any tension.

- Pursed lip breathing.

You can't do this one in a slouched posture! Sit up reasonably straight (but you don't have to be as straight as a soldier at attention, just be comfortable.) Now breathe in through the nose. Purse your lips (as though you were about to kiss someone) and breathe out quite forcefully through pursed lips – it should take you twice as long to exhale as inhale, ideally.

“Do these two exercises several times a day for two weeks, and you will see a noticeable improvement in your capacity,” says van Bever Donker.

You can also buy a little gadget called a spirometer or a lung exerciser (for a very reasonable price – and suppliers will deliver). This is often used to improve muscles strength and lung capacity in patient with conditions like asthma. To find out which suppliers offer this simple gadget, or to ask for advice on breathing exercises, contact your physiotherapist.

Go to www.saphysio.co.za to find a physiotherapist close to your home.

References

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/323787#belly-breathing>

<https://www.physiciansweekly.com/aerobic-exercise-eases-depression/>