

Here are some of the ways to get your breathing back to the relaxed ‘factory settings’ you were born with. If you watch a sleeping baby breathe you will see that its belly expands as it breathes in, and falls back when it breathes out. This is because only the diaphragm is pulling air in, and the rest of the muscles that the baby will use to get extra air in when it is upset, or short of breath, are resting. Although it can take a while to ‘get it’ again, and it might even feel odd to start with (even though it is pleasant), usually people find that once they ‘get it’ then it can become easier and more familiar.

Slow gentle breathing exercises work without belly breathing, just they work even better with.



Image courtesy of yodiyim at FreeDigitalPhotos.net

What is the diaphragm? How does it work?

Your diaphragm is a dome of muscle that sits between your chest and abdomen (belly). It works automatically. It is working now. The trick is to let it just do its work on its own without the muscles around your belly, chest and shoulders changing things.

All muscles work by getting shorter - “contracting”. When the dome-shaped diaphragm contracts it becomes **flatter** overall. This means the space above it - containing your lungs - expands, and this pulls air into your chest. Because the diaphragm is also pushing down on your belly then it pushes everything inside your belly slightly down and outwards. When you let your tummy muscles relax **this feels as if your belly is expanding or filling** as you breathe in.

When you breathe out the diaphragm relaxes and everything just goes back to where it was to start with. It **feels as if the belly is emptying**.

Help from Gravity - Lying on your back.

Lie on your back with one hand on your chest and another on your belly button area. Take your time. Just notice what is moving when you breathe. What happens to your belly when you breathe in? You can just lie there and notice and focus on relaxing your chest, shoulder and tummy muscles and see what happens as you just breathe gently and slowly. Or you can deliberately try taking one breath in that pushes the belly hand up. Then you can see if you can raise the belly hand whilst moving the chest hand as little as possible. Just relax and have fun with it. If it doesn’t do anything much today, just try again soon. Once you’ve got it, you can also practice the same thing sitting up, until you are confident.

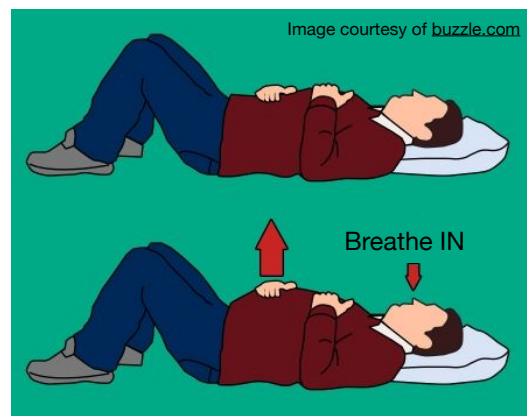


Image courtesy of buzzle.com

Scrunch and Relax

Start by squeezing all the air out of your chest by tightening all your belly muscles, front, sides and also all the muscles around your bottom. Squeeze hard to get every bit of air out. Hold it for a few moments, then just breathe in and let everything go. Your belly will “expand” and air will rush back into your lungs. Then do the same but more and more gently with each breath. Eventually everything can relax and the diaphragm can just get on with its job.

Imagine ...

Some people like to picture that they are actually breathing the air right into the belly, which is a bit like a kind of balloon. It blows up when you breathe in, and goes down when you breathe out. Some people picture the air coming in and out through the heart, or lower breastbone area. Whatever feels right.