

# Autogenic Drainage Exercises

Information and advice for patients

## *Community Respiratory Service*

Autogenic drainage is a breathing technique to help clear phlegm from your chest by moving the phlegm towards your throat using different sized breaths.

### **What are the benefits of the exercises?**

The benefit of doing this exercise is that it is more effective at clearing phlegm from your chest than coughing alone. Your physiotherapist has asked you to complete the autogenic drainage exercises because it will help you:

- Keep your chest clear from mucus and so, reduce your risk of getting a chest infection
- Make your breathing easier
- Help to improve lung health

### **What are the risks of the exercises?**

You may feel short of breath or dizzy during the exercise; if this is the case, you should go back to relaxed breathing. There are no major risks for this exercise, however you should only try this breathing technique if you have been instructed to by your physiotherapist and have been shown how to do it.

### **What are the risks of not doing the exercises?**

By not doing this exercise, the mucus in your windpipe will not be cleared. As more of it builds up, your breathing will become more difficult and your chance of developing infections will increase. If you do not do the technique regularly and as instructed, it will be less effective.

### **Are there any alternatives to these exercises?**

Whilst there are alternative exercises, your physiotherapist has asked you to perform autogenic drainage exercises as it is an appropriate breathing technique for you to do. If an alternative breathing technique is appropriate, this will be explained to you and you will be given a separate leaflet about it.

### **How to perform the exercises**

If you are unsure about this technique, contact your physiotherapist

1. Breathe in slowly through your nose
2. Pause briefly for 3 seconds.
3. Push your breath out steadily with your mouth open (like a sigh) so you can hear your secretions.
  - You should hear crackles if you are doing this correctly
  - If you wheeze, you are forcing air out too quickly. Take a break and try again.

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4. Breathe in slowly and gently but not too deeply (to prevent the mucus slipping back down)
5. Pause for 3 seconds
6. Push your breath out again completely
7. Repeat steps 1-6 until you feel your mucus moving into your upper chest or feel the urge to cough
8. Take a slow but deeper breath in
9. Pause for 3 seconds
10. Breathe out harder and push out as much air as possible.
11. Cough once or twice to clear your throat

Relax for a minute or two before trying again. Continue until your chest is completely clear and you cannot hear any crackles.

### **Symptoms to report**

If you experience sudden sharp chest pain or cough up any blood, contact the Community Respiratory Service or go to your nearest Emergency Department (ED) immediately.

If you experience any of the below symptoms, you should return to breathing control until your symptoms pass:

- Wheezing while you breathe
- Chest tightness
- Feeling light-headed

If you continue to experience any of these symptoms, you should contact your physiotherapist.

### **Follow-up**

Your physiotherapist will review your exercises. Should you have any concerns, you should discuss these with your physiotherapist. You can obtain contact details for your physiotherapist from your ward.

### **Contact details**

If you have any questions about the autogenic drainage exercises, please contact:

#### **Community Respiratory Service**

0121 612 2007

Monday – Friday, 8am – 8pm

Saturday & Sunday, 8.30am – 4.30pm

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## Community Respiratory Service

### Further information

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites [www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk) and [www.swbhengage.com](http://www.swbhengage.com), follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs](http://www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs).

### Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- COPD – Journal of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, 'Airway clearance in COPD: need for a breath of fresh air? A systematic review', 2011
- National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, CG101 'Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease: Management of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in adults in primary and secondary care', June 2010
- The British Thoracic Society, 'BTS Guidelines for non-CF bronchiectasis – Quick Reference Guide', July 2010
- Journal of Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation, Issue 1, 'A comparison of autogenic drainage and the active cycle of breathing techniques in patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases', 2000

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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