Thick-It®

Easy Does It:
Relaxation Techniques for Managing Dysphagia

Regardless of the cause, swallowing disorders can cause anxiety for patients as well as caregivers. In turn, the tightness in the chest and throat that often accompanies anxiety can make swallowing seem more difficult.[1]

Many of the organs, muscles, and nerves that control swallowing are also essential for breathing and vocalization.[2] Improving the function for one can have beneficial results for other functions, as well.[3]

Here are a few time-honored techniques for relaxing the body and mind for more comfortable eating and drinking with dysphagia.

just breathe

Pranayama is a set of yoga practices focused on breathing. Evidence suggests the practice can have a positive effect on levels of clinical stress and anxiety.[4]

bhastrika pranayama

Also known as bellows breath, this is an energizing practice that supports the respiratory and digestive systems and tones the core.[5]

Sit up tall in a sturdy chair or on the floor. Close your eyes. Straighten the spine. Relax your shoulders.

Get settled with a few deep, even breaths, allowing your abdomen to expand as you inhale.

To begin the practice, inhale then exhale quickly and audibly, with force, as if you were panting.

Start slowly, taking one breath per second. Perform 3 rounds of 7–10 breaths, eventually building up to 30 breaths per round.

Rest for 15–30 seconds between each round. Take relaxed, natural breaths, and tune in to how you feel.[6]

Coherent Breathing

Try this slower, more contemplative exercise when you need to relax. Sit comfortably, straighten your spine, and place your hands on your belly.

Close your eyes and slowly breathe in counting to 2, feeling your belly expand beneath your hands.

Pause for a moment, then slowly release your breath counting to 2 while silently counting to yourself.[7]

Strike a Pose

You don't have to travel to experience the physical and mental benefits of yoga. There are many asanas (poses) you can do in a chair or even from bed! [8]

Stretch

On first waking, take a deep, slow breath. Stretch your body the length of the bed. Point and flex each foot.

Heel Slides

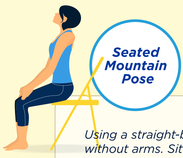
Lying on your back, slowly slide one heel towards the buttock, then back out straight. Do 10 heel slides on each leg, while pulling your belly button in toward your spine.

Knee to Chest

On your back, pull one knee toward your chest and hold for 5 seconds while breathing deeply. Do 3 sets, holding each knee for up to 20 seconds.

Trunk Rotation

On your back, bend your knees keeping your feet on the bed hip-width apart. Roll your knees from side to side as far as you can comfortably.



Seated Mountain Pose

Using a straight-back chair without arms. Sit toward the front of the chair, keeping your spine straight, feet flat on the floor with ankles directly under your knees, hands on your knees. Feel your lower body pressing into the chair while lifting your chest and head up, lengthening the spine.[8]

Seated Twist

Begin in seated mountain pose, and put your left hand on your right knee and your right hand on your right hip. Take a deep breath, then gently breathe out while turning your body to the right, looking over your right shoulder. Feel the gentle stretch for a few seconds. As you exhale, rotate back to center, then repeat the pose on your left side.[9]

Sing Out

A music therapy-based singing program focusing on breathing, articulation, and vocal intensity can significantly improve voice, respiratory control, and swallow while enhancing quality of life for persons with Parkinson's disease.[2]

Pitch Glide

Another musically-inspired exercise that has been shown to contribute to improved voice control as well as swallowing. Take a deep breath, and make the sound "eeee" while moving from your lowest pitch to your highest. Repeat 10 times each session.[9]

Find products and tips for improving life with people with dysphagia on the Thick-It® brand's dysphagia education platform.

Visit thickit.com/education

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