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Vocal Cord Dysfunction (VCD)

The vocal cords are located at the top of the windpipe (trachea) and vibrate from exhaled air to produce noise and voice. Breathing causes the vocal cords to open, allowing air to flow through the windpipe (trachea) and into the lungs. With VCD, the vocal cords close together, or constrict, during inhalation or exhalation. This leaves only a small opening for air to flow through the windpipe and causes asthma like symptoms.

Breathing Exercises

1. Abdominal / Diaphragmatic Breathing

Focus attention on the lower abdominal muscles, place one hand gently on the abdomen with the thumb on the navel and the fingers below the thumb. While exhaling, bring the abdomen “in” towards the back making the tummy appear smaller, then just let the tummy out whilst inhaling. Try not to use chest or throat muscles. If the hand is placed on the chest during abdominal breathing it should not be moving. Practice these techniques several times daily until you are familiar with them so that you will be able to use them more effectively when necessary.

2. Exhaling Through Pursed Lips

Try exhaling through slightly pursed lips, like gently blowing out a candle while whispering a gentle “ssssssssss” sound. Keep lips symmetrical about teeth rather than puckered and do not have lower lip touching upper teeth as it would be if you were to say ‘summer’. Some people prefer to make a hissing sound. Others prefer to whisper an exhaled ‘ssss’, ‘ssss’, ‘ssss’ sound in the same breath in short bursts.

3. The 7:11 Breathing Pattern - the opposite of hyperventilation

Sit down and close your eyes for a little while. Just become aware of your breathing...and breathe in to the count of seven... and breathe out to the count of eleven. You can hold for a couple of seconds at the bottom of the out breath if that's comfortable for you. It may be a little difficult at first, but doing this **regularly** causes your general anxiety level to come down. You may also find that you begin to breathe this way automatically if you feel anxious. Regular relaxation actually starts to inhibit the production of stress hormones in the body so it actually becomes harder and harder to panic. As you become more generally relaxed the 'baseline' of arousal from which you are starting lowers. It becomes harder to get stressed! Hyperventilation responds very well to this technique. If you practice this daily, hyperventilating should cease to be a problem very quickly. It can also give you much more control over vocal cord dysfunction spasms.

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