

Why Diaphragm Breathing is a Helpful Strategy for Accented Speakers: How to Do It

For many accented speakers, learning how to speak from a diaphragm breath will be a great strategy for slowing down your fast speech and feeling more comfortable while talking.

Diaphragm breathing is achievable but may feel awkward at first if this is a new skill. Most people are chest breathers and do not naturally speak from a diaphragm breath. It may take a week to wire your brain to learn how to launch a breath from that area. The good news is you can learn to speak from a diaphragm breath, and as a bonus you will also experience better projection and speak with richer vocal tones.

Level One: Establishing the Diaphragm Breath

Mastering diaphragm breathing is a two-part process. First, you need to learn how to take a diaphragm breath in isolation and speak a full thought using it. The greater skill is learning how to take a second and third diaphragm breath during conversation. Listed below are activities to help you learn how to take a diaphragm breath:

Lying Down

- People automatically breathe from their diaphragm while lying down. If you are unsure of what a true diaphragm breath is, lie with your back against the floor. Place one hand on your stomach and chest; then breathe. Congratulations, you are diaphragm breathing!
- Focus on your breathing. Your midsection should be moving outward and inward while your chest remains fairly still. Spend time feeling this motion. This is the goal when speaking in the sitting and standing positions.
- Count from one to twenty-one from a full diaphragm breath. This count is equivalent to saying a complex thought. When you are finished, you should still have air left for talking. Exhale the rest to impress on yourself how much air is available for speech. For those of you who are shallow breathers, having leftover air for speech will be very new to you. Notice that your voice is stronger and that speaking with a full breath is comfortable.

Standing Tall

- Practice breathing in the standing position. Nothing has changed with your breathing patterns, only your position. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Breathe in and out through your nose. Your midsection should be moving inward and outward, while your chest and shoulders remain fairly still.
- A way to prompt yourself if you are having difficulty is to stand and lean over into a 90-degree angle with your hands on your midsection area. In that position your breath will come from the diaphragm. Gradually stand up and try to take a diaphragm breath. If you continue to have trouble, give yourself the prompt and try again. Remember, this new skill will take time and practice.

If a diaphragm breath is difficult, try these great tips:

1. Fully exhale all of the air in your lungs including the residual air. Get all of the air out to where there is nothing left and you feel breathless. When you inhale, notice that the breath came from your diaphragm. Since your lungs felt empty, your body recovered with a full diaphragm breath. This is the place where you eventually want to breathe while communicating.
2. Inhale through your nose. Your abdominal muscles should be moving forward. If you are getting a chest breath and/or seeing heavy shoulder movement, try to focus on your abdominal muscles moving forward. When it is time to exhale, pierce your lips and notice the abdominal muscles moving inward toward your spine. This activity will cause movement in the diaphragm area. Try this rhythm:
 - Inhale on a count of 2 and exhale on a count of 4.
 - Inhale on a count of 3 and exhale on a count of 6.
 - Inhale on a count of 4 and exhale on a count of 8.
 - Inhale on a count of 5 and exhale on a count of 10.
3. If it is still difficult to find the diaphragm area, do a football or karate “huh-huh” and notice that it is coming from the midsection of your diaphragm. It is this area where diaphragm breathing occurs.

This may feel awkward at first since this is a new skill. If you are having difficulty doing this without moving your chest, return to the lying down position to see and feel correct diaphragm breathing. This is a matter of rewiring your brain for something different.

Note: You may feel light-headed from diaphragm breathing. This is caused by taking in more oxygen than what you are used to having. If this occurs, sit down and breathe normally. Return to practice later.

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Training opportunities we offer include:

1. Work with a speech coach privately or online
2. Accent Reduction 4 Week Class in Denver or online
3. Self Study
 - a. Book and choice of auditory support
 - b. Book, auditory support and watch our recorded-live Accent Reduction Seminar