

Coping with Respiratory Concerns

ALS causes respiratory muscles to weaken, resulting in difficulty breathing and impaired airway clearance. This not only makes breathing more difficult but also increases the risk of aspiration and infection of the airways. However, there are things you can do to improve respiration and manage breathing problems as they occur.

Please note that I AM ALS does not provide medical advice. Please discuss your symptoms and potential interventions with your physician or respiratory therapist prior to attempting it.

Breathing & Coughing Exercises

- **Breathe Deeply:** Inhale, hold your breath for 10 seconds, & slowly release your breath.
- **Take breaks** throughout the day to catch your breath.
 - **Plan your schedule** so activities are spread throughout the day.
- **Huffing:** Take two deep breaths, and then force all of the air out of your lungs with a series of huffs, keeping both your mouth and vocal cords open.

Non-invasive Devices

- **Incentive Spirometry:** This device promotes deep breathing, lung inflation, and strengthening of respiratory muscles.
- **Cough Assist Machine with Suction:** An airway clearance device that aids in deep breathing, lung expansion, & clearance of the airway with suction.
- **BiPAP Machine:** A device that uses positive pressure to keep the airways open, particularly at night while at rest.
- **Oscillatory Vest:** An inflatable vest connected to a machine that delivers high-frequency vibration to your back and chest to loosen mucus in the lungs and airways.

Positioning

- **Sit up straight** while eating or drinking.
 - Remain seated for at least 30 minutes after eating or drinking, before lying down.
- **Refrain from lying flat** for long periods of time, which can make breathing difficult.
 - Use **wedges/pillows** to prop yourself up while laying down.
 - Acquire a **hospital bed with head elevation features**.
- **Postural Drainage & Percussion:** Use gravity and percussion (the clapping of hands on the chest or back) to loosen thick mucus, which can then be easily coughed up or suctioned.

For more information, please review the guide on [Breathing Issues](#) from ALSA: Texas Chapter and/or the chapter on [Respiratory Care](#) from Les Turner.