

Learning to Use Diaphragmatic Breathing (belly breathing) to Reduce Regurgitation, due to Rumination Syndrome

Rumination is not something you are aware of doing, but the regurgitation occurs when your stomach muscles actively tighten. Learning to relax those stomach (abdominal) muscles has been shown to successfully reduce the regurgitation. This is the purpose of diaphragmatic breathing.

To get started sit or lie down in a relaxed position. Wear loose fitting clothes and loosen any belts before starting. Take a deep breath in - moving the hand on our chest up. You could start lying down with a book or a stuffed toy on your chest. You should find that while the hand on your chest will move up, the hand on your abdomen should stay relatively still. Then to start diaphragmatic breathing, it is the exact opposite, take breaths only moving the abdomen up, while keeping the chest as still as possible.

See the picture over the page, this is diaphragmatic breathing. Doing this breathing results in relaxation of the abdominal muscles that cause regurgitation. They simply cannot contract at the same time as you do this breathing method. Each breath in and out should be slow and steady, at least 3 seconds each. As the picture shows, you can practice the abdominal breathing by putting the book or stuffed toy on your belly, making it go up and down. Move it up as far as possible by breathing out slowly and completely. Some people find it is easier to do this breathing by pushing breath out through a small opening in your lips (pursed lips) or by pretending to be blowing up a balloon.

While you might start learning this method lying down, as most regurgitation occurs during or shortly after meals, it is especially important to practice the method while sitting. You can practice using one hand placed on your upper chest and the other hand on your abdomen, just below your rib cage.

Once you have practiced and you are ready to do this technique during meals the best time to start is midway through the meal if your regurgitation often occurs during meals. If your regurgitation occurs after the meal, start diaphragmatic breathing straight after meals for a full five minutes, take a ten minute break and then repeat the cycle. You might want to do this three times after the meal, or after each episode of regurgitation. Sit quietly the whole time focusing on your breathing and moving your belly hand out, while keeping your chest hand as still as possible (see Picture 2).

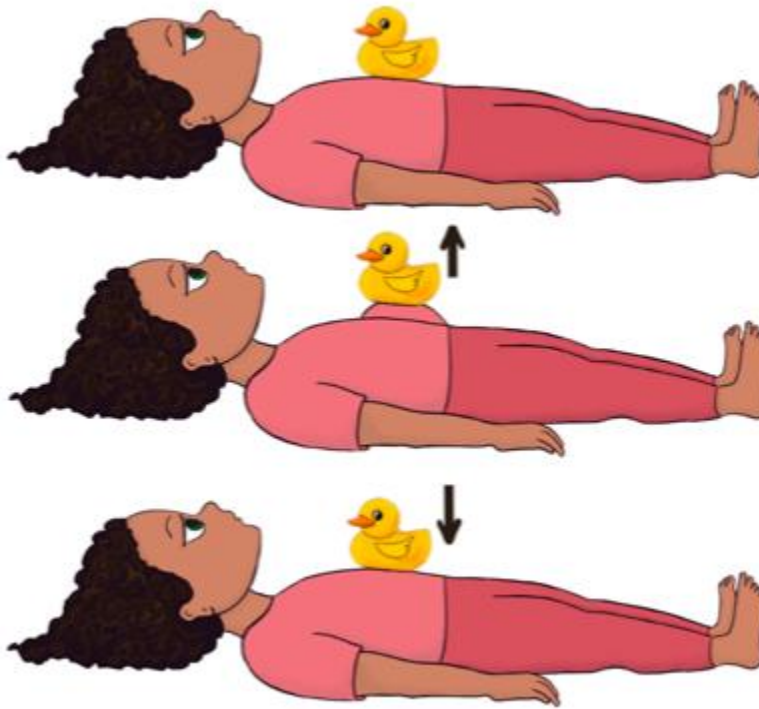
The long-term goal for diaphragmatic breathing is for it to become something you do effortlessly during any event that can trigger regurgitation. Diaphragmatic breathing may feel very awkward at first, but the more you practice the easier and more effortless it will become.

To help make this method work best for you pay attention to when rumination occurs during your day. You might even keep a notebook or diary of each day and usual timing or trigger for your regurgitation.

The technique works because rumination is essentially an involuntary habit that we need to interrupt. You can compare it to an involuntary facial tic with facial muscles contracting repeatedly. In this case the contraction is abdominal and diaphragmatic muscles. Because these muscles simply cannot be contracted at the same time as you do diaphragmatic breathing you can reverse this habit.

Practice is important for success.

With practice, this breathing should become an unconscious behavior during and after eating that successfully replaces the regurgitation.



Picture 1: practicing belly breathing lying down

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Picture 2: belly breathing while sitting for meals

Drawing provided by Miranda van Tilburg, Ph.D.