

Breathing

Breathing is a process that involves the diaphragm, muscles between the ribs (intercostal muscles), abdominal muscles, and muscles in the face and neck. When we breathe in, or inhale, the muscles contract and draw in air.

ALS can affect the muscles used to breathe. Although this usually occurs in late stages of the disease, in some cases it can occur in the early stages. If a person is not able to breathe properly, it can upset the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood causing an increased amount of carbon dioxide in the blood. Too much carbon dioxide in the blood is called hypercapnia.

Symptoms

If you notice any of the following symptoms, please discuss them with your ALS/MND Clinic team:

- Shortness of breath – you may notice shortness of breath with activity such as walking, eating, dressing, or bathing. It can also occur with talking or at rest.
- Feeling breathless when laying down
- Poor sleep quality
- Morning headaches
- Tired or sleepy during the day

Bi-level Therapy

Bi-level positive airway pressure therapy (sometimes referred to as BiPAP) is a type of non-invasive ventilation that can help support breathing. A bi-level device is connected to a tube and mask to push pressurized air into your lungs. This device delivers two pressure levels: a higher pressure when you inhale (breathe in) and a lower pressure when you exhale (breathe out). The pressure settings are determined by a doctor. Bi-level therapy allows the patient to breathe more easily. During a clinic appointment, the Respiriologist determines if this treatment option is appropriate for people with ALS.

Oxygen Therapy

Oxygen therapy is not usually used for people with ALS because it can affect the way your body takes in oxygen and result in hypercapnia. It may be used for people with ALS if there are other underlying lung conditions such as pneumonia, COPD, emphysema, or asthma. You should always discuss if oxygen is the best choice for you with your ALS/MND Clinic team/Respiriologist.

Oxygen Alert Bracelets and Oxygen Alert Wallet Cards

The ALS/MND Clinic provides oxygen alert bracelets and oxygen alert wallet cards to alert other health care providers regarding oxygen use in people with ALS. The wallet card was created by the ALS Association and was developed to include fundamentally important considerations for someone with ALS in an emergency. It folds to fit easily in a wallet, pocket or car glove compartment.