

10 Things to Know

Breathing Easier with ALS



1 **Muscles are essential for breathing**

Muscles, such as the diaphragm and others in and around the ribs, are required for inhalation and exhalation. Weakened muscles makes breathing harder.



2 **You have a team**

A pulmonologist and respiratory therapist (RT) are key members of your ALS team. They will monitor how your lungs are working and provide helpful respiratory interventions.



3 **Signs to watch for**

Feeling short of breath during activity, having trouble breathing when lying down, vivid dreams, morning headaches, or daytime drowsiness may be signs of weakening breathing muscles.



4 **Energy conservation**

Because muscles tire, including those used for breathing, consider conserving your energy for the activities that are most important to you. PT and OT can offer suggestions to ease the work of breathing during activities or while resting.



5 **Invasive ventilation**

Invasive ventilation supports breathing through a tube placed in a surgically created opening into the trachea, called a tracheostomy. Patients and their caregivers receive training regarding how to care for the tracheostomy and related equipment.



6 **Keep airways clear**

Deep breathing and coughing are natural ways to clear your airway of foreign matter. RT can suggest breathing interventions or devices that can help maintain healthy lungs and airways.



7 **Non-invasive ventilation (NIV)**

BiPAP, Bilevel ventilation or BPAP, all are the same things, and refer to Bi-level positive airway pressure. NIV supports inadequate breathing with use of a mask or mouthpiece. It may be recommended for use initially during nighttime hours, with increased use during the day as needed.



8 **Use of oxygen has risks**

Low oxygen levels for someone with ALS is likely from shallow breathing. NIV may provide the ventilation necessary to address the low oxygen levels. Oxygen should only be prescribed by a provider knowledgeable in pulmonary disease and ALS, and ventilation support should be readily available.



9 **Breathing easier at mealtimes**

A speech therapist, dietitian, or respiratory therapist can offer tips for safer swallowing and making breathing during meals easier.



10 **Make informed decisions**

Talk with your ALS clinic team to understand your options for respiratory support. Communicate your wishes about breathing interventions to providers and loved ones.