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WINTER NEWSLETTER

Special Thanks to all those that have completed the "**Blue Zone**" Senior Screen. It has been a great success so we have decided to keep it **free for the rest of the year** and will work with more Doctors to help their treatment and guidance of patients' well being.

In this issue, we dive deep into the breath—how something most take for granted can significantly impact recovery, health, performance, and daily calm.

Inside this issue, you'll discover:

- **Is Your Breathing Normal?** – Recognising and fixing dysfunctional patterns
- **Cold Immersion + Breathing Retraining** – A powerful combo for muscle recovery and mental resilience
- **BradCliff Breathing Method** – A framework for posture and breath efficiency
- **Nasal Strips That Work** – With 15 years of clinical experience and personal use of nasal strips, here's an overview of the current options.

Whether you're an athlete aiming for peak performance, a parent seeking better sleep for your kids, or someone chasing calm in everyday life—we've got something for you.

IS YOUR BREATHING ACTUALLY HELPING YOU – OR HOLDING YOU BACK?

Breathing is something we do all day, every day — without thinking. But for many people, **the way they breathe isn't doing them any favours.** In fact, dysfunctional breathing is surprisingly common and can leave you feeling fatigued, anxious, foggy, or short of breath — even if your lungs are perfectly healthy. Here's how to tell if your breathing is on track, and what to do if it's not.

Read the full article here — it includes several videos for those who prefer to learn visually.

What Does Healthy Breathing Look Like?

Efficient breathing is calm, quiet, and natural. It helps your body stay relaxed, supports better posture, boosts energy levels, and plays a big role in managing stress and sleep quality.

A healthy pattern usually includes:

- **Breathing in and out through the nose**
- A **gentle rise and fall of the belly** (diaphragm movement), not the chest
- A **steady rhythm** of around 10–14 breaths per minute at rest
- A soft pause after exhaling

What Are Signs of Dysfunctional Breathing?

You might have an unhelpful breathing pattern if you notice:

A unhelpful breathing pattern usually includes:

- Frequent **sighing, yawning**, or **mouth breathing**
- Feeling out of breath during normal activity
- Tightness in the chest, racing heart, or dizziness
- Trouble concentrating or increased anxiety
- Habitual upper-chest breathing (especially during stress)

These patterns can quietly build up over time — especially after illness, injury, high stress, or periods of inactivity.

Breathing Works NZ has a great overview of this.

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What Are Signs of Dysfunctional Breathing?

Step one is simply becoming aware of how you're breathing. Try this:

- Lie down with one hand on your chest and one on your stomach.
- Breathe gently through your nose.
- Aim to feel your **stomach rise more than your chest,** with a soft, easy rhythm.
- Let your exhale be relaxed, without forcing it.

Practising this for even a few minutes a day can help reset your system. Over time, the goal is for this calm, diaphragmatic breathing to become automatic — not just during rest, but during movement and exercise too.

How Physiotherapy Can Help

At Pontifex Physiotherapy and Performance, we can assess your breathing pattern and work with you to retrain it using proven techniques. This can be especially helpful if you're managing:

- Anxiety or high stress
- Long COVID or post-viral fatigue
- Neck or rib pain
- Asthma or persistent breathlessness
- Sleep issues or snoring

We also use tools like nasal strips, breathing resistance devices, and targeted movement retraining to support better function.

Following a thorough assessment, we work through progressive stages of breathing retraining:

Lying at rest – easiest position to develop awareness and control

Seated – reinforces breathing patterns in more upright posture

Standing – adds core control and postural challenge

Walking – introduces coordination with movement

Running – for those needing performance integration

Lifting & exercise – managing breath under load

Sport-specific movement – if required for return to play

Each stage is tailored to your goals, whether it's improved daily function, reduced symptoms, or enhanced athletic performance.

Nick has been a Bradcliff Breathing level 3 Practitioner for over 15 years so he has plenty of experience and expertise in this area. Advanced breathing retraining can also include the use of the KH2 digital assessment system in-clinic, complemented by a POWERbreathe device for structured home-based training.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE THAT LOVE THE COLD?

We have expanded on this topic with our blog post here.

COLD IMMERSION THERAPY AND BREATHING RETRAINING: A POWERFUL COMBINATION

Part 1: What happens to the body with cold immersion and breathing retraining

Optimal Temperature and Time for Ice Baths : To maximise the benefits of cold immersion therapy, it's important to adhere to the recommended temperature and duration:

Temperature: The ideal temperature for an ice bath is between 10-15°C (50-59°F). This range is cold enough to trigger the body's beneficial responses without posing a significant risk of hypothermia. Experienced ice bath uses can go lower, however, gym lovers beware as extreme low temperature decreases the length of time you are able to stay in the water and reduces the breathing potential benefits.

Time: The optimal duration for an ice bath is 10-15 minutes. This time frame allows for sufficient exposure to the cold to achieve the desired effects on muscle recovery and nervous system without overtaxing the body.

DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO AN ICE BATH?

Although the evidence isn't as strong as the water likely won't be as cold, try a cold shower or the ocean during winter!

SOME OF THE KEY BENEFITS OF COLD IMMERSION?

1. **Enhanced Nervous System Regulation:** Cold immersion activates the sympathetic nervous system, which helps in building resilience and stress tolerance.
2. **Improved Mental Focus and Calmness:** The shock of cold immersion requires immediate mental focus, helping to quiet the mind and reduce extraneous thought activity.
3. **Stress Reduction and Emotional Resilience:** The combined practice of cold immersion and breathing retraining helps to reduce cortisol levels and increase the production of endorphins, leading to lower stress levels and enhanced mood.

WHAT BREATHING TECHNIQUES CAN YOU USE DURING YOUR COLD IMMERSION THERAPY

PART ONE: INITIAL RESPONSE

Inspiratory Gasp and Hyperventilation:
The initial shock of cold water immersion often causes an involuntary gasp followed by rapid breathing (Tipton, 1989). This can take 1-2mins on average before your deeper breathing will start to naturally subside.

PART TWO: MODIFIED BOX BREATHING

Once this has occurred, we recommend a form of box breathing. The sta box breathing technique is: 4 seconds for inhalation, 4 seconds for post inhalation pause, 4 seconds for exhalation, 4 seconds for post exhalation pause. However we suggest using the below which doesn't focus on time, but on feeling your breath. We all have different sensitivities to breathing and we all have different lung volumes so to have fixed time frames often can create anxiety for some people unnecessarily.

- **Inhale:** As slow and as big as you feel possible/comfortable
- **Inhale pause:** Hold your breath as long as you feel possible/comfortable
- **Exhale:** As slow and as long as you feel possible/comfortable
- **Exhale pause:** Hold your breath as long as you feel possible/comfortable

This is great for helping to calm your mind and reduce your heart rate. This can be performed for 2-5 minutes.

PART 3: BELLY/DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

Once you have settled mind and body with the modified box breathing, it is great to switch over to diaphragmatic breathing. This is where you can really maximise the parasympathetic system while calming the mind and body. Some key techniques to remember with this technique are:

- Use very little to no chest movement during your breath in
- Let your belly expand as you breath in
- Have little to no pause after your breath in
- Try and take a slower and longer breath out than your breath in
- Try and have a natural pause after your breath out as long as you are comfortable

This should occur for 3-10mins

BRADCLIFF BREATHING METHOD: MORE THAN JUST BREATHING

The BradCliff Breathing Method is an internationally recognised, evidence-based approach used to assess and treat Breathing Pattern Disorders (BPD). Developed by leading physiotherapists and widely taught to health professionals around the world, it's now part of undergraduate physiotherapy education and used across a wide range of medical disciplines — from neurology and psychiatry to women's health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, and sports performance.

At Pontifex Physiotherapy, our team is trained in the BradCliff Method and integrates it into treatment not just for patients with breathing-related concerns, but for anyone where optimising breathing could support injury recovery, performance, or long-term wellbeing.

This framework forms the foundation of our breathing evaluations — whether we're helping restore healthy baseline breathing, reduce symptoms like breathlessness or anxiety, or enhance performance for sport and training.

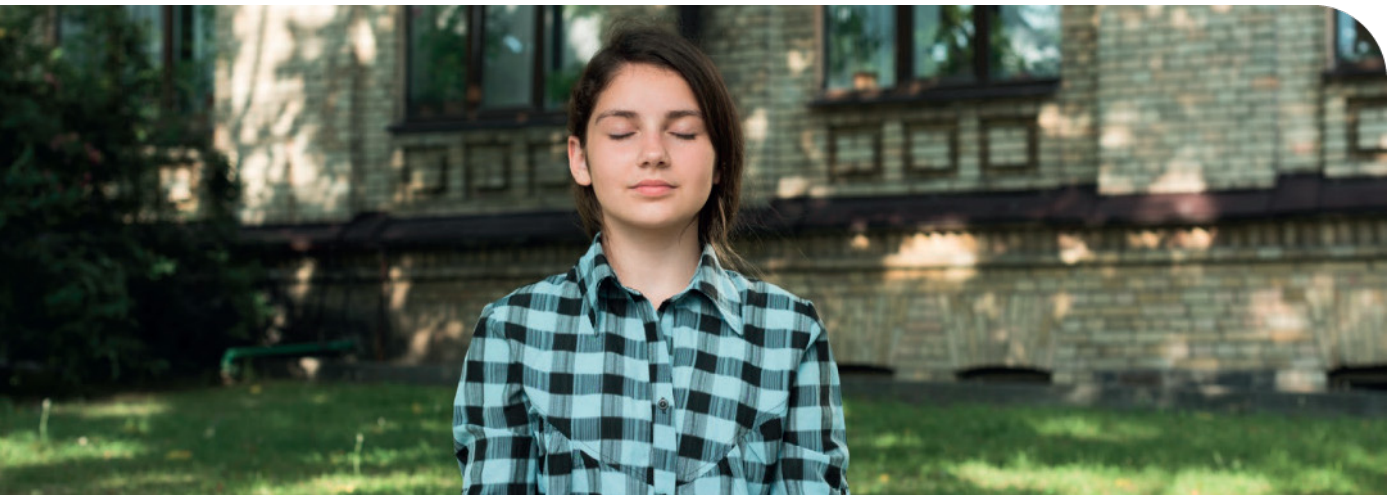
NASAL STRIPS: SMALL BUT MIGHTY

- We have another great blog post that goes into detail about the many good reasons why you might start using nasal strips in our blog post here. I have been using nasal strips personally and professionally for over 15 years and tried almost all the different options over the years. Nasal strips can be effective for everyday use, to help improve breathing during cold/flu issues, to help achieve baseline calm during a breathing session or more advanced uses for performance.
- I talk in a bit more detail in the blog about three main Brands
    - **Breathe Right**
    - **Nozibye**

Nozey Breathe Right has been around the longest and is a good trusted brand. However, The extra strength version is their best version, but sadly only Chemist Warehouse stock the Sensitive skin option which sometimes isn't sticky enough for people. The Nozibye is about a third of the cost and is a very good option with good adhesion and a strong strip creating a good improvement in nasal airflow. These are available through amazon. Nozey is a sydney based company that you can buy directly from their website and have good options

- **Usage tips:** Trim 2–4 mm off the edges for children aged 5+, ensuring a snug fit on smaller noses.
- **Why it matters in rehab:** Used as a breathing retraining tool to promote nasal and diaphragmatic mechanics, saving energy and reducing stress.

Read the full article here



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