

Unanswered questions from the Movement and Breathing OMS webinar

1. I would like to know if there is something to be done about flexed legs.

If your legs tend to get stuck in a flexed position, I expect you have some spasticity combined with weakness. It is important to have this properly assessed by an appropriate healthcare professional and ensure that you are on suitable medication to manage this. They will also be able to tell whether the flexed position is permanent shortening of the muscles or whether there is still some flexibility within the muscle to lengthen it again to reduce the flexed position.

If they are permanently shortened this is known as contractures. If this is the case, 24-hour positioning advice is key to reduce continued deterioration and optimise comfort. A programme of daily stretching is recommended where possible in any situation where spasticity is an ongoing problem.

Referral to a spasticity clinic can be crucial in managing developing and ongoing issues like this to explore things like Botox injections or other medication options. Also, do you have any muscle activity in the legs? If so, it is important to work with the muscles that are active to reduce continued deterioration. If standing is possible, it is an effective way of reducing and normalising muscle tone (spasticity) and we often will use a standing frame for some of our clients who cannot stand without help.

Hydrotherapy if available can be useful to help reduce spasticity as can vibration therapy. Airflow splints are another therapeutic option which have fallen a bit out of fashion now, but I believe can be helpful in some cases.

2. What about breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth?

The ideal is in and out both through the nose. When you breathe out through your mouth you lose around about 40% more moisture than through your nose. Also, when you open your mouth the pressure in your airways instantly drops thus reducing the potential for airflow into the deepest parts of your lungs.

Of course, it can be difficult to maintain your mouth closed when you start practising these techniques so don't be too hard on yourself. Maybe start with in through the nose out through the mouth and build up to full nasal breathing. Start at your level! Also it may be that you can manage the full nasal breathing at rest but not with activity, so again, build up to it.

3. I suffer from rhinitis and if my nose is stuffy it can feel like I won't get enough air if I breathe through my nose, but am I getting more oxygen with nose breathing, nonetheless?

Try this to relieve the blocked nose: sit up straight, take a breath in through your nose and out, hold your nose and hold your breath for as long as you can and sway from side to side. When you feel the need to breathe in, release your nose and breathe in through it. Give yourself a few minutes to recover your breathing. Repeat 5 times.

This should help to reduce the inflammation in your nose and allow you to continue with the other breathing exercises. For more information look at the YouTube videos of 'Patrick McKeown unblock nose' or refer to his book, The Breathing Cure, for lots of great info around this.

4. Would you recommend sea swimming for combined breathing and activity?

Sea swimming is great exercise, but swimming is clearly not appropriate for nose breathing. However, it is great for developing good breathing control.

5. How do you lower your breathing rate when you use a CPAP machine at night?

Good question. I would speak to your respiratory professional or whoever sets up your CPAP about that. I don't have much experience with CPAP. But I would advise you work on your breathing rate in daytime. Try focusing on timed breath in for 4 secs out for 6 secs. If this feels too much, try a 3sec/3sec balance to start

6. Is rebounding on a mini trampoline good for MS?

Rebounding is great exercise for increasing heartrate and boosting mood! It also has a very positive effect on your nervous system waking up the spinal pathways that are important for postural control. So yes, great suggestion! I forgot to include that in my talk 😊

7. Where can I find information about stretching exercises?

Ideally you would discuss an individualised stretching programme with your healthcare professional if you have one. You can find good generic advice on sites such as MS Trust and MS Society. We have a stretch class online that is very popular through our centre. If you are interested in giving it a go, get in touch.