

Airway Clearance Techniques: Autogenic Drainage

What are airway clearance techniques?

Airway Clearance Techniques (ACTs) are an essential part of management for people with CF. Performing regular airway clearance helps loosen the thick sticky mucus from the airways so it can be cleared more easily. Autogenic drainage (AD), or self-drainage, is an airway clearance technique recommended for older children or adults.

What is autogenic drainage (AD)?

AD is a controlled breathing technique that involves breathing at different lung volumes to move mucus from the small airways to the larger airways. It is a gentle technique that keeps the airways open, so mucus is more easily removed. You will be instructed to suppress your cough during the technique to prevent airway closure.

AD can be adapted to suit your needs and can be done in either modified postural drainage positions or sitting. It requires a great deal of concentration and intuition, and it may take some time to learn the technique. Each AD routine will be different and should always be taught by a CF specialist physiotherapist.

There are 3 phases of AD – Unsticking, Collecting and Evacuating:

- The Unsticking Phase targets the mucus in the smaller airways by breathing at the base of the lungs. This is achieved by taking small breaths at low lung volumes.
- The Collecting Phase collects the mucus that has been mobilised in the Unsticking Phase by breathing in the low to mid part of the lungs.
- The Evacuating Phase removes mucus from the large central airways by breathing in the mid to high part of the lungs. Mucus can then be cleared by huffing or with a cough.

Useful Resources

- Airway Clearance Techniques Factsheet
<https://www.cfw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/CF-Fact-Airway-Clearance-Techniques.pdf>
- Bronchiectasis Toolbox
<http://bronchiectasis.com.au/physiotherapy/techniques/autogenic-drainage>
- Cystic Fibrosis Foundation- Autogenic Drainage
<https://www.cff.org/Life-With-CF/Treatments-and-Therapies/Airway-Clearance/Autogenic-Drainage/>

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