

# Sleep and Breathing

- **Many polio survivors have shortness of breath**
- **Some polio survivors have disturbed sleep**
- **You can get tests done to check your sleep and breathing**

## Breathing

Respiratory issues relate to your lungs and breathing. Some polio survivors have problems with breathing. This may be due to weak muscles or changes to the shape of your chest. Symptoms may include:

- shortness of breath during activity and/or at rest
- difficulty with clearing your throat
- getting colds/chest infections often
- speech difficulties
- anxiety

## Respiratory Assessment

If you have these symptoms, you should get a respiratory assessment. This can:

- help to find the reason for the breathing problem and the time it takes to recover
- look for possible heart problems or other health problems
- find out your physical fitness and muscle endurance

## Lung Function Test

A lung function test shows how well the lungs are working. It is important to have this test if you had “bulbar” polio (polio that affected your brainstem). It is also important if you have scoliosis (curve in the spine). This test can help if you have to have surgery. It will give guidelines about recommended bed posture and how intense your rehabilitation should be.

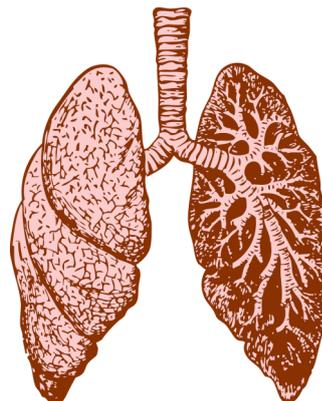
This test can be conducted by a [respiratory physiotherapist or respiratory physician](#).

## Aids To Help You Breathe

Ventilator aids can help you breathe better. Non-invasive ventilator aids ([usually masks you wear](#)) can help your breathing. Examples are intermittent positive pressure ventilation (IPPV) or Bi-Level Positive Air Pressure (BIPAP). Talk to your [respiratory physiotherapist or respiratory physician](#).

There are things you can do to help your breathing with the aids. These include (not all of these will be appropriate for you):

- respiratory muscle training
- stopping smoking
- cough assistance
- [weight loss](#) and aerobic [exercise](#)
- better posture
- treatment of difficulty breathing in your sleep
- having flu and pneumococcal vaccines
- early treatment for colds/chest infections



## Sleep Problems

You may have trouble with sleeping. It may be due to:

- chest and spinal deformities
- weak breathing muscles
- damage to the respiratory system from polio

Problems related to sleeping include:

- **obstructive sleep apnoea**: partial or complete blocking of the throat during sleep
- **central sleep apnoea** and hypoventilation: frequent pauses in breathing during sleep
- joint and muscle pain that wakes you from sleep
- random muscle twitching (including **restless legs syndrome**) - medication is available to treat this

## Symptoms

Symptoms of sleep problems can include:

- fatigue
- feeling sleepy in the daytime
- problems with thinking clearly or concentrating
- morning headaches
- Snoring



You might also feel anxious and irritable as a result of sleep problems. It is important to look after your **mental health**.

Sleep disturbance could be a sign of another health problem. You should talk to your GP about getting it checked. An overnight sleep study might be recommended. Other things that might lead to sleep disturbance include obesity, pain, and stress.

## More Information

- A respiratory physician specialising in neuromuscular disorders is recommended to test and manage respiratory complications.
- **Sleep Health Foundation**

*This information is from [The Late Effects of Polio: Introduction to Clinical Practice](#)*

*Thank you Anne Duncan from [Austin Health: Victorian Respiratory Support Service](#) for providing information and reviewing this fact sheet.*

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