



Why the Balloons?

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In the past week I have received some questions from various patients in the clinic inquiring as to why patients are blowing up balloons as part of their exercises. So, I decided what better time to provide some insight for those who have not been able to participate in conversations regarding this technique.

First, the goal of blowing up the balloon is to facilitate muscle activity of the abdominals. By activating these muscle you promote trunk flexion (forward bending), thus, creating muscle inhibition of the trunk extensors (the muscle that runs the length of your spine on the back). To give a point of reference, it is similar to doing a biceps curl. If you perform a biceps curl the triceps has to be relaxed enough to allow the forearm to proceed to flex at the elbow. This is a key component in helping to reduce back pain and conditions that are associated with the subjective reports of “tightness” in the back muscles. By creating an active inhibition you will create longer lasting relief that is easily reproducible at home without having to resort to passive muscle inhibition activities such as massage and moist heat.

Second, the balloon also slows down the exhalation phase of respiration, which provides a benefit for people who experience shortness of breath that is often associated with increased accessory breathing activity. Accessory breathing muscles include your sternocleidomastoid and scalene muscles, which are located in your front of your neck. Increased muscle activity in these muscles is often associated with neck pain and limited motion in the neck.

Third, slow exhalation also promotes rib depression which is good for reducing elevated ribs and reducing stress on excessive lordotic curves (curves in the lower spine).

Finally, the resisted exhalation also helps to increase intra-abdominal pressure that is so important for core and spinal stability. The goal for any individual is to be able to maintain the air in the balloon without pinching the neck of the balloon, thus, demonstrating an ability to generate intra-abdominal pressure via activity of the abdominals and diaphragm and demonstrating true spine stability.

In conclusion, the balloon serves a purpose similar to any dumbbell you might find in a gym, it helps promote muscle activation by providing resistance. The goal in the rehab setting is muscle inhibition specific to the back and neck via this muscle activation. So the next time you are stuck blowing up a large quantity of balloons for some special event, know there is more going on than just hot air leaving your mouth!

Source: <http://posturalrestoration.com/>