



**Cecilia**

**Controls Her Asthma**





# Cecilia Controls Her Asthma

## Authors

Javier Contreras  
Mercedes Sanjurjo  
Anabel Ochoa  
Ana Malagón

## Illustrations

Mar Domínguez

## Sound

David Segoviano

## Editing

Carlos Bravo

## Music

José María Segoviano  
Alberto Segoviano

## Translation

Robin Longshaw



“Not again!” Cecilia said to herself, annoyed.

It felt harder and harder to breathe during the game, even more than other times. It was as if she wasn’t breathing enough. She didn’t want to tell her coach, but she felt tired. She put up with it until she couldn’t run another step, but finally she had to say something to the coach. She walked to the bench and Ana went in for her.

Cecilia didn’t understand what had been happening to her lately, but right now she couldn’t keep running and she had to sit down.

As she walked out of the gym after the game, she was thinking hard. She knew her teammates didn’t have any trouble running – she’d just watched them win!

It was the Friday night basketball game – a big game, one for the record books. Her team beat the team from El Val by fifteen points, the bleachers nearly collapsed under the fans’ applause, and her coach had congratulated the whole team. It was really exciting.

The coach told Cecilia’s dad that he was worried because he could see that she wasn’t running like she had before. Once they were back home, her mom noticed that Cecilia was coughing more than the last couple of nights. Cough syrup didn’t do any good, and neither did her grandmother’s remedy – an onion on the nightstand!



Cecilia couldn't go on like this. Her parents decided that they needed to see Dr. Bermudez, her pediatrician and old friend. She had been Cecilia's doctor since she was a baby.

When they got to the doctor's office, Cecilia was already feeling a lot better.

"Good afternoon, Cecilia," Dr. Bermudez said, smiling. "What brings you here?"

Cecilia told the doctor how she couldn't run as much as she used to during basketball games. She also told her that she didn't feel well, that it was hard to breathe, she coughed a lot, and she was a little afraid that she was going to get worse.

"My, my," Doctor Bermudez said as she examined Cecilia carefully. "So you're a basketball star."

"Well, sort of," Cecilia answered, a little embarrassed.



"I'm going to listen to your chest with this device. I need you to take a deep breath and then blow it all out," Dr. Bermudez told her.

"Like this?" Cecilia asked.

"That's perfect," the doctor replied.

"What do you hear?" Cecilia wondered.

"It sounds like a lot of dwarves are inside your lungs, whistling. That means that you might have asthma, but to check it, you need to blow really hard through another device that has a hose on it. It measures your lung function. You need to take a really big breath through this tube and then blow as hard as you can. It's like when you blow out the candles on your birthday cake."

Cecilia took the biggest breath she could and then blew it out again.

"Good work, Cecilia! That was a huge breath!" Dr. Bermudez said, looking at the results.





"Yes, you have asthma. But don't worry. I'll tell you what you can do so that you can keep doing the things you like, and even sleep all night without coughing."

Cecilia was worried. "Will I be able to keep playing basketball?" she asked.

"Of course! There are lots of basketball players and other athletes who have asthma. That doesn't mean that they stop training, playing, or winning!"

"And what do I have to do?"

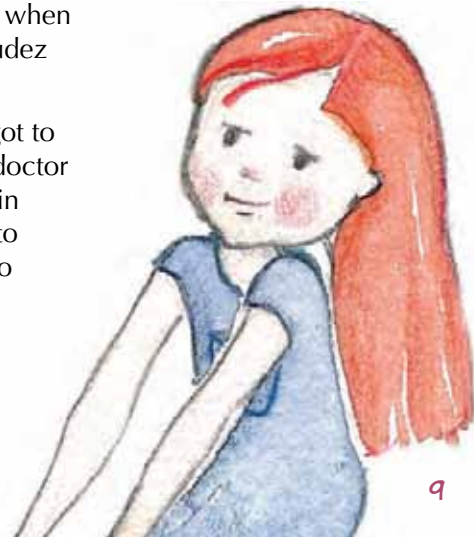
"I'm going to tell you what medication to take and how to take it. I'm also going to order a test to check if you have any allergies. There's something else that's going to help you breathe well. It's very important, but we need a little more time. Can you come back tomorrow after school? I'm sure you're going to love it!" the doctor promised.

"We'll be here," Cecilia and her mom said together.

They were a lot happier now that they knew what the problem was. The doctor had explained the treatment that Cecilia needed to use when she couldn't breathe well. Dr. Bermudez had made them feel more relaxed.

The next day Cecilia and her mom got to the appointment right on time. The doctor asked them to get very comfortable in their chairs. Then, she moved close to Cecilia and said softly in her ear, "Do you want me to tell you a secret?"

"Of course! I love secrets."





"But mine is very, very, very ... important," Dr. Bermudez replied.

"Those are the ones I like best," Cecilia said. "I'll never tell anyone!"

"I know I can trust you," the doctor said. "After all, I've known you since you were in diapers. OK, here goes."


Cecilia was all ears.

"A long, long time before I moved to this town, I was an explorer. Yes, really! I traveled to many places in search of adventure and treasure. I learned a lot of things during those years. Do you want to know what people called me then?"

"Yes, yes!" Cecilia said excitedly.

"Well, my name was ... Bermudez, the Great Explorer. On one of my voyages, my ship arrived in Neverland. That's where I met Peter Pan."





“Really, doctor? The famous Peter Pan, in the book?” Cecilia asked. She felt really important.

“I’ll tell you a story,” Dr. Bermudez said.

“Tell us, tell us,” Cecilia and her mom begged.

“For a long time, Peter Pan had been training to become the best swordsman in the whole history of swordsmen. He practiced for hours and hours – that rascal!” Dr. Bermudez laughed.

“It seemed like he never got tired. But after a while, he started to have problems breathing, and he coughed a lot. In fact, he was coughing more and more all the time. That’s when his friends called me. I ran to see what the matter was, and I discovered that Peter Pan had asthma. The same things were happening to him that happen to you now. Although once I taught him how to control it, hardly anyone knew that he had asthma.”





"Go on, please," Cecilia said.

"Ever since that trip, I've had a special fondness for that boy. Do you want me to show you what I taught him?"

"OK. What do I have to do?" Cecilia asked.

"The first thing is to sit very, very comfortably in your chair. Move around until you find a position that you like."

Cecilia wiggled in the chair until she was comfy.

"And you, 'Mrs. Mother,' can sit in this chair and do what Cecilia does. Just follow my instructions," Dr. Bermudez told Cecilia's mom.

Now Cecilia understood that Dr. Bermudez, with her hair as white as sea foam, eyes that were the blue-green of coral reflected in the sea, a small, smiling mouth and wrinkles on her forehead, had been an explorer in her youth! Amazing – she had been an explorer with a compass and binoculars, and had traveled all over the world and discovered new lands!





Cecilia was really excited to know her explorer-pediatrician's secret, a secret that they shared with her mom... Dr. Bermudez had told them both after they promised never to tell anyone, ever. They were going to keep the secret, so nobody ever found out about Dr. Bermúdez.

While Cecilia and her mom got comfortable, the doctor dimmed the lights in the examination room, sat on her own chair, cleared her voice, and started to speak softly.

"Let's explore your breathing. Close your eyes and imagine that you're somewhere very pleasant. It could be a beach, a garden, or any other place that makes you feel good."





Dr. Bermúdez continued, “Peter Pan liked to imagine that he was lying on a warm beach in Neverland. Once he was there, I showed him to breathe well – I mean through his nose, with his belly, and slowly. You need to breathe very slowly... like an ant, not like an elephant.

“You can imagine that you’re anywhere, while you pay careful attention to your breathing. Breathe very, very slowly. Remember, breathe like an ant.

“Now close your mouth and breathe only through your nose... notice how the air goes in your nose, and then out of your nose. That’s much better... breathe slowly and gently. You don’t need to fill your lungs all the way, and you don’t need to empty them all the way.”

Cecilia and her mom followed the doctor’s instructions, breathing slowly and gently.

Dr. Bermudez continued, “When the air goes out of your nose it’s a little warmer and when it goes in, it’s a little cooler. Pay attention to the small movements your body makes as you breathe, too... notice as the air goes in and out... the air goes in... and out, the air goes in... and out... and you keep paying attention to how you’re breathing.



“Very slowly, put one hand on your chest and the other on your belly, and observe how they each move when the air goes in and out. It comes and it goes... it comes and it goes... the air comes and it goes out.

“Now imagine that you have a balloon in your belly, and you’re blowing it up with the air that comes in through your nose... and it deflates when the air goes out of your nose. You breathe in, and then out, while the balloon in your belly inflates and deflates... The air comes in and it goes out... the balloon inflates and deflates...

“Now try to only move the hand that’s on your belly. Pay attention to how your hand goes up when you breathe in. Your belly inflates when the air goes in... and it deflates when the air goes out.”

Cecilia and her mom moved their hands up and down with their bellies. Cecilia imagined that she had a big white balloon inside her. The room was quiet and the only sound was their soft breathing.

“Now only your belly is moving as you breathe... when the balloon inflates, your hand goes up, and when it deflates, your hand goes down... Breathe slowly through your nose and with your belly...” Dr. Bermudez said.





“Blow your belly up slowly through your nose: one, two, three... and let the air out very slowly through your nose: one, two, three... and breathe slowly in again: one, two, three... and out even more slowly: one, two, three, four...

“Breathe in again: one, two, three... and out... one, two, three, four... Keep breathing that way a few more times, breathing in one, two, three... and out, one, two, three, four...

“Remember, you’re in that pleasant place that you imagined at the beginning, while you keep breathing very, very slowly. Enjoy how your belly goes up and down slowly. And pay attention to how the air keeps going in and out of your nose, very gently.

“Now you can slowly open your eyes. Don’t get up quickly – yawn and stretch first.



“Whenever you feel tired, take a moment to go back to that place in your imagination, breathe slowly, relax, and be very, very calm. Practice a little bit every morning and every afternoon. That way, when you have an asthma attack, you’ll be able to breathe easily and it will help you feel better. Peter Pan got a lot better breathing like this when he had an attack. The more you practice, the easier it will be. I bet you didn’t imagine that you had a treasure so close to you!”

Cecilia got up little by little, and leaning toward Dr. Bermudez, she winked and said, “Thank you, Bermudez the Great Explorer. You showed me how to work magic. I feel really happy and relaxed – you showed me the treasure of breathing. It was so close to me, and it’s going to help me feel better every time I do it.”

“You’re welcome,” the doctor answered. “Until infinity, as Peter Pan would say.”

“And much, much further.”



The End



This story is written for boys and girls with asthma, as well as for their parents and caregivers. It teaches a simple breathing and relaxation technique via a children's story. The book is accompanied by a CD that includes a recording of the story; in order to make learning this technique easier, the child has only to follow a few simple guidelines.

Let your child read or listen to the story during a period when her asthma is well controlled. She can practice the technique as often as she needs to, until she is able to use it nearly spontaneously, without effort.

In the early stages of an asthma attack, when symptoms are still mild, it is important that both children and their parents or caregivers react calmly. If the child sits in a comfortable space, breathing slowly through his nose and using his diaphragm, he will be more relaxed and will be better able to use his prescribed medications.

Under no circumstances should using this breathing technique take precedence over following your doctor's instructions.

The team that has collaborated on the creation of this story hopes that it helps to reduce the feelings of insecurity, suffering, and helplessness that are often the lot of patients who have the most severe forms of the illness.

We would like to thank the countless people who have contributed to bringing this project to life.

**Dr. Javier Contreras**  
**La Paz University Hospital, Madrid**  
**April 2010**





# Cecilia Controls Her Asthma

