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The Respiratory System

H&SP Medical Anatomy & Physiology 14a

Lab Activity

Background

The respiratory system is crucial to an individual's overall health, and respiratory distress is often one of the first indicators of a life-threatening illness. The function of the respiratory system is to exchange gases between the external air and the body. The lungs are the primary organ of the respiratory system that performs this function. The lungs take up a large portion of the thoracic cavity and are actually attached to the surface of the thoracic cavity by a sticky pleural membrane. The pleural membrane produces a liquid called surfactant that allows the lung to stick to the ribs. On occasion, air gets caught in the space between the lungs and the thoracic cavity and can cause the lungs to collapse. This may be caused by trauma, infection, or can occur spontaneously.

The amount of oxygen needed by the body, and carbon dioxide produced by the body, can vary greatly depending on an individual's activity level. Exercise can increase the need for energy produced by cellular respiration, and therefore the oxygen demanded by the body, by 25 times. An increase in the rate of respiration can meet this demand.

Process of Respiration

Step	Process
1	The intercostal muscles contract, pulling the ribs up, and the diaphragm contracts and moves down, pulling air into the body through the mouth or nostrils.
2	Air passes through the nasopharynx or oral pharynx through the epiglottis , which prevents food from entering the trachea.
3	The trachea contains tiny hair-like cilia and mucus that catch any particles in the air that could be harmful to the lungs, and moves them back up the trachea to be spit out.
4	Air moves down the trachea, which branches into the right and left bronchi .
5	Right and left bronchi continue to branch, much like an upside-down tree, into smaller limbs called bronchioles .
6	The bronchioles end in tiny clusters of air sacs called alveoli , where gas exchange will occur.
7	Alveoli have extremely thin membranes surrounded by pulmonary capillaries from the cardiovascular system. An adult has approximately 300 million alveoli in the lungs for gas exchange.
8	Oxygen that has been pulled into the alveoli diffuses through the alveoli membrane and into the capillaries to be circulated throughout the body for cellular respiration.
9	Carbon dioxide that has been created by the body through cellular respiration is brought by the capillaries to the alveoli and diffuses into the alveoli.
10	The diaphragm relaxes, moving up and causing air in the alveoli to be exhaled.

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