
Section 1

How do
your lungs
work?

How the lungs work

The lungs do the work of breathing for the body. Breathing brings oxygen into the body and gets rid of carbon dioxide. Oxygen is needed for every cell in the body. Oxygen is carried in the bloodstream to all the cells. After the cells use the oxygen, carbon dioxide is produced. The body cannot use carbon dioxide. The carbon dioxide must be disposed of. The lungs get rid of the carbon dioxide by breathing it out.

The body brings oxygen in through the mouth, down a tube called the trachea. Then it passes into the airways or bronchi and bronchioles of the lungs. The airways in each lung resemble an upside-down tree. The airways are big at first, like a tree trunk, but then become very small, like the small branches of a tree. At the end of each very small airway is a very small structure called the alveolus. It looks like a bunch of grapes. Here oxygen is absorbed into the body and the carbon dioxide is filtered out, to be exhaled.

