

Leaflet issued by:

Respiratory Services

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Managing Breathlessness

On request, this publication can be supplied in alternative formats including large print, Braille, audio tape and disk. We can also translate the Information into languages other than English. This publication is also available on our website.

Your local healthcare provider



Bending

Bending from the waist makes breathing very difficult and can cause breathlessness, try to reduce how often you bend over by using appropriate aids such as grip bars and 'helping hand' grabbers.

Helpful tips:

- Ease yourself into a crouching position, keeping your back straight and bending from the knees, rather than from the waist. This allows you to keep your chest upright and your shoulders back which will allow you to breathe as comfortably as possible.
- You will need something secure to hold on to such as a table or sofa, as you ease yourself into this position. This will provide extra support and give you something to push against as you stand.
- If you need to work at a level below the waist, emptying the washing machine or a cupboard, or whilst gardening, use a low stool and sit, rather than bend.
- Don't forget your 'Blow as you go' technique, this can help when you are bending down.

Talking on the telephone

Rushing to answer the telephone before someone hangs up or finding that you have to stand to talk can make breathlessness worse.

Handy Tips:

- Try to make sure that your family, friends or work colleagues know that it can take some time for you to answer the phone.
- Ask them to let the phone ring for a longer time so that you do not have to rush to it.
- Try to make sure that you are sitting down comfortably before you pick up the phone and take a moment to 'catch your breath' before starting your conversation.
- If you find you become breathless whilst talking on the phone or in conversation, try to talk in short sentences.
- Pause after each sentence rather than talking quickly and for a long time before taking a breath.



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Living with breathlessness

This booklet is based upon the experiences of people who live with breathlessness. It is aimed at helping you to manage your breathlessness.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide you with advice to help you manage your shortness of breath, minimising its effects upon your life, so that you can look forward to doing activities you enjoy.

What makes you breathless or cough?

Everybody has certain 'triggers' for their breathlessness and cough. It is therefore important that you try to reduce your contact with those elements, as it may help reduce your breathlessness or coughing episodes.

Some common irritants may be:

- Cigarette smoke
- Cleaning products
- Perfumes & deodorants
- Dust
- Pollens and moulds during peak months
- Pollution
- Cold air
- Dry air



Controlling your breathing

Often, breathlessness can lead a person to breathe with their upper chest and shoulders in a rapid and shallow manner. This type of breathing uses a lot of energy and causes considerable fatigue.

By controlling your breathing, you can produce a more relaxed and gentle breathing pattern. It involves **relaxing your upper chest and shoulders** and **breathing at a normal rate**.

Pacing your breathing during activity

Walking and managing slopes and stairs

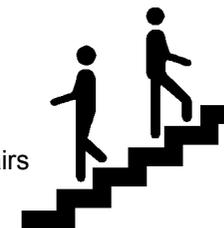
You may be anxious about tackling stairs or walking up slopes especially if these have caused you shortness of breath in the past.

You can use your breathing techniques whilst you walk, climb stairs or undertake any kind of activity. This can help control your breathing and breathlessness and therefore enable you to do more.

Helpful tips:

- Match the rate of your breathing with your walking pace., for example breathing in for one step, and breathing out on the next two steps.
- For stairs, you could breathe in for one step, and breathe out for two steps. Getting this right may take some practice, so take your time matching the right number of steps to your breathing so that breathing feels comfortable
- Using 'Blow as you go' technique (see overleaf) for steps/climbing stairs.
- PACE yourself and take your time, remember a moderate pace gets you further!
- After completing the stairs, rest and make sure you continue with your breathing control and pace to help you recover.

Using these techniques will help you to walk and climb stairs at a steady pace, It may also reduce the time you need to recover once you have reached the top of the staircase.



Standing

To ease your breathing when standing up, lean from the hips, with your forearms resting on something at the right height. For example using chairs, window sills, garden walls or kitchen work surfaces are often of a suitable height.



Alternatively you can lean your back up against a wall, with your feet hip width apart. Relax your shoulders and let your arms hang loosely by your sides.



Handy tips:

When you're standing or walking, try putting your hands on your hips, in your pockets, or stick your thumbs into your belt loops to support your arms without gripping. If you carry a shoulder bag, you can rest your arms on it.

Lying on the bed

Make a slope with 3 or 4 pillows. Lie high up on these pillows, with the whole of your side supported. Knees should be slightly bent. Alternatively, you can lie on your back with your head and knees supported by pillows.

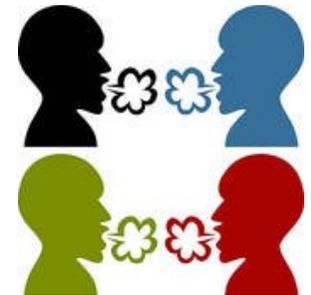


Simple 'Breathing Control' Exercise

When you live with breathlessness, it is important that you learn how best to control your breathing so that you can help yourself in times of difficulties.

The best way to learn how to control your breathlessness is to practice a technique called 'Breathing Control'. 'Breathing control' is gentle breathing using the lower part of your chest, with your chest and shoulders relaxed. It can help by, making your **breathing easier**, allowing **energy to be used more effectively** and can encourage your **breathing pattern** to return to normal.

1. Find a quiet place free of distractions.
2. Obtain a comfortable position in either sitting or standing. You can use the 'Positions of ease' described in the next section
3. Loosen any tight clothing.
4. Concentrate on relaxing your shoulders, resting your hands in your lap or on the arms of the chair. Turn your palms upwards towards the ceiling to help release shoulder tension.
5. Regulate your breathing. Making sure that you take a slow breath in through your nose, and exhale fully through your mouth. Try to breathe out twice as long as you breathe in (e.g. inhale for 2 counts, and exhale for 4 counts)
6. You may find it helpful when you breathe out to 'sigh out', or you can use the 'Pursed-Lip Breathing' technique discussed in the next section.
7. Continue this pattern of rhythmic breathing until you feel your breathing rate gradually slowing down, and you feel more in control of your breathing rate.



Breathing Techniques

Try these techniques gently, and in your own time. You can use all of these techniques if you like, and combine them together if you find that it helps. Try to find which techniques work for you best.

Pursed-lip breathing

Breathing out with your lips pursed, as if you were whistling. This may help to slow your breathing rate, and helps to make your breathing more efficient.

Pursed lip breathing technique

1. Relax your neck and shoulder muscles.
2. Breathe in (inhale) slowly through your nose for two counts, keeping your mouth closed. Don't take a deep breath; a normal breath will do. It may help to count to yourself: inhale, one, two.
3. Pucker or "purse" your lips as if you were going to whistle or gently flicker the flame of a candle.
4. Breathe out (exhale) slowly and gently through your pursed lips while counting to four. It may help to count to yourself: exhale, one, two, three, four.



With regular practice, this technique will seem natural to you.

'Blow as you go!'

Breathing out when you are making a big physical effort, for example when:

- Bending down
- Reaching up
- Standing up
- Going up a step or stair/s
- Or during the hardest part of any physical action you may be under-taking.

Positions of Ease

When breathing becomes difficult, there are several positions that may help you get control of your breathing with minimal effort. The best positions are the ones which need the least energy or effort. If you tense your shoulders and grip onto things when you are breathless, you're wasting energy (and oxygen). You may find some of the following positions helpful:

Handy Tips:

- Using a walking aid (walking stick, or a wheeled walking frame) may help you find one of these comfortable postures when you are out and about. Some people find pushing a shopping trolley helps with their breathlessness.

Sitting

Sitting uses less energy than standing up. You may find it useful to lean forwards, resting your forearms on your knees, or on the arms of a chair or table.



You can also rest your head and arms on pillows on a table when you feel really short of breath.