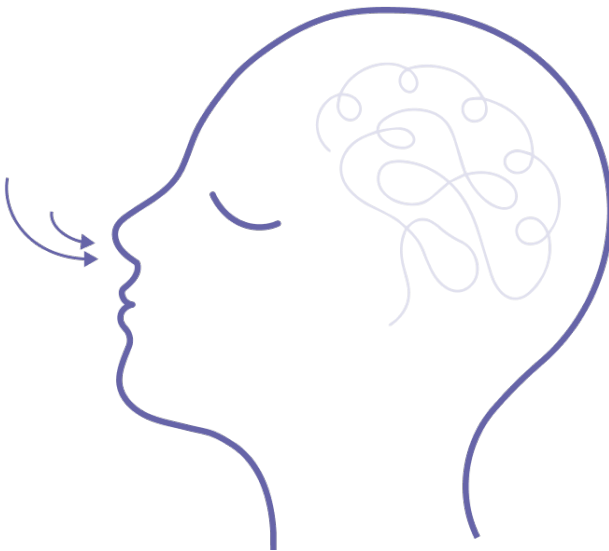


Coping with Breathlessness

Information for patients



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Coping with Breathlessness

Breathlessness is a normal response to exertion however, having a lung condition can cause this response to happen faster. In simple terms, your lungs are working harder to get oxygen into your body.

Breathlessness can be a frightening experience and cause panic, making you take smaller and faster breaths. Learning to control your breathing can help to reduce this.

This booklet provides some techniques and strategies that are designed to help relieve breathlessness during these times.

Pacing

Pacing refers to the act of slowing down tasks and taking short breaks when completing day-to-day activities. This will help to maintain a more consistent energy level throughout the day, rather than experiencing extreme highs and lows.

Top tips:

- Use a diary or timetable to plan your day, ensuring you have some quieter times to rest and recover
- Break activities up into smaller, more achievable tasks
- Use energy conservation techniques when completing more challenging tasks e.g. sitting down whilst completing ironing or cooking
- Prioritise what is most important to you!

Positioning

Changing the position of your body can relieve pressure on the bottom of your lungs, which can help ease symptoms of breathlessness. Once in your preferred position, try to relax.

Remember to take rests sooner rather than later.



Image from Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust

Top tips:

- Avoid trying to take deep breaths or forcing the breath out
- Avoid speaking whilst you are recovering
- Allow yourself to breathe through your mouth until the breathlessness settles
- Pillows can make the positions above feel more comfortable.

Breathing Control

Breathing control refers to the act of breathing gently, with minimal effort. It can be used in situations when you feel yourself becoming anxious or panicked due to breathlessness.

1. Gently breathe in and out throughout your nose, paying attention to the rise and fall of your chest
2. If you are unable to breathe out through your nose, breathe out through 'pursed lips' (see below)
3. Gradually begin to make the breaths slower and focus on letting your body relax.

Pursed Lips Breathing

This technique can be used at any time when breathless or when performing a physical task that causes breathlessness.

1. Gently breathe in through your nose
2. Blow out through pursed lips, like you are blowing out a candle or through a whistle
3. Breathe out for as long as feels comfortable
4. Avoid forcing the breath out.

'Blow-as-you-go!'

Breathing out during the most effortful part of an activity can help tasks feel more manageable. For example, breathing in as you lift your foot up onto a step and breathing out as your step-up onto it.

Hand-held fan

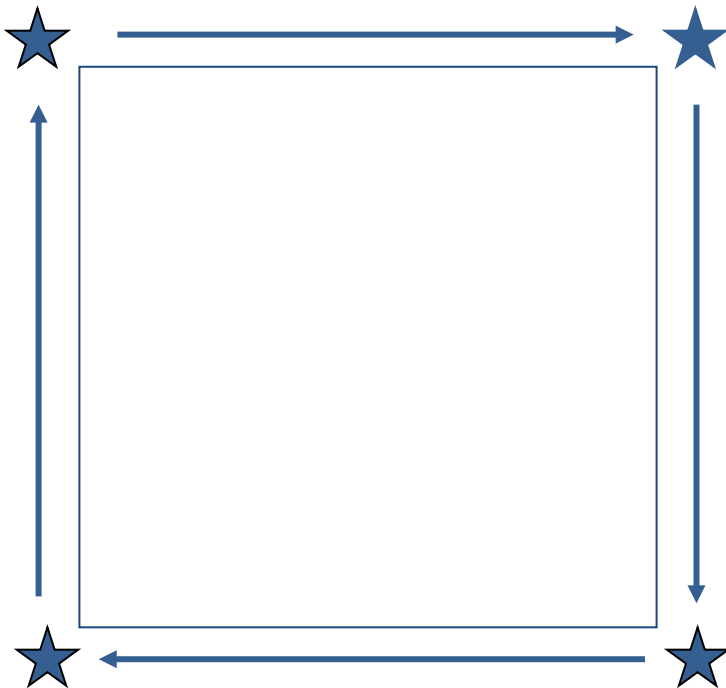
The sensation of cool air on your face can help reduce the sensation of breathlessness. A small, hand-held fan that fits into your bag or pocket can be useful for when you are out and about.

Hold the fan in front of your face so that the air is blowing over your nose and top lip.

Box Breathing

This tool can be used in any setting – simply find a square object in your surroundings.

- Follow the outline of the box with your finger or eyes
- Start at one corner and take a breath in (at the star)
- Breathe out along the arrow
- Try to slow your breathing as you make your way around the box
- Repeat as many times as required.



Useful Links

Visit the links or scan the QR codes below:

My Lungs, My Life – a guide to living with COPD and asthma.

www.mylungsmylife.org



How Can I Manage My Breathlessness? – advice for a wide range of lung conditions.

www.asthmaandlung.org.uk



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www.careopinion.org.uk/549/respiratory-physio-opd5



