



## Patient Information

# Managing Breathlessness

Everybody gets breathless at times, for example when running for a bus or climbing a long flight of stairs. People with lung disease will get breathless more easily and it will probably take longer for them to recover.

### **Breathing Techniques**

There are various techniques for helping to cope with breathlessness. With practice these can be used every day after activities, which may cause breathlessness, or they can help to manage if you suddenly become short of breath.

### **Breathing Control**

The aim is to reduce the effort of breathing and regain control. This improves the efficiency of the muscles that help us breathe and helps improve our activity ability.

### **How to achieve breathing control**

Settle in a comfortable well-supported position.

Before starting give a good sigh out through your mouth as this will automatically make your shoulders and neck muscles relax.

- Place your hand lightly on your upper chest and the other on your abdomen just below where the ribs divide
- Take a normal breath in through your nose and feel the hand on your abdomen rise up and out
- Now breathe out through your mouth and feel the hand on your abdomen sink down and in, the hand on your upper chest should hardly move
- Breathe at a rate that is comfortable for you

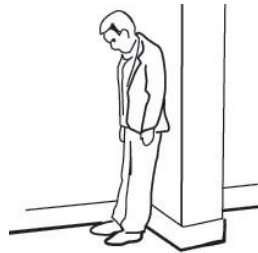
Now, when breathing, try to make your breathing out last twice as long as when you are breathing in (it will help to count slowly as you breathe in and out).

### **Positions to help with breathlessness**

- You may find that you automatically use certain positions as you feel it helps with your breathing
- Best positions are ones which need the least effort or energy
- If your shoulders are tensed up and you grip onto things when you are breathless, you are wasting oxygen and energy

## Managing Breathlessness

To help get your breath back to normal, in standing, lean forward from the hips with arms resting on a support, or lean backwards against a secure surface with your head and shoulders relaxed



A walking aid (walking stick, frame) can help you find these standing postures when you are out and about. Most people feel better pushing a supermarket trolley – it provides support.

- Sit with your back against the back of the chair shoulders rolled forward and relaxed downwards
- Your feet should be flat on the floor
- Rest your arms and hands on your thighs, palms turned upwards
- Do not lean through your hands, and keep your shoulders relaxed
- Lean forwards resting your forearms on your knees or on a table in front of you



- Lying on your side with several pillows under your head and under your upper arm is often comfortable - remember to try both left and right sides



Try these positions and decide which ones are best for you. Different positions will suit different situations.



# Managing Breathlessness

## Pursed lip breathing

- Breathe in through your nose and exhale with your lips pursed as if you were going to whistle
- Try to exhale longer than you inhale
- Use the same force that you would use to cool hot soup on a spoon. Blow hard enough to cool it but not hard enough to blow it off the spoon
- Pursed lip breathing creates a back pressure in the mouth and throat and this helps to blow the airways open.



## Blow as you go

Do the hardest part of the task while you're breathing out. For example:

**Lifting** - Breathe in slowly. Lift and place the object while you breathe out slowly.

**Pushing or pulling** - Breathe in slowly. Push or pull the object while you breathe out slowly.

Repeat until the job is done.

## Paced breathing

Useful when climbing up stairs or going up slopes/hills. Always use the handrail/banister for balance. You should match the rate of your breathing with your walking pace. You should breathe in on one step and out on the next two steps for example when you are climbing stairs. 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.

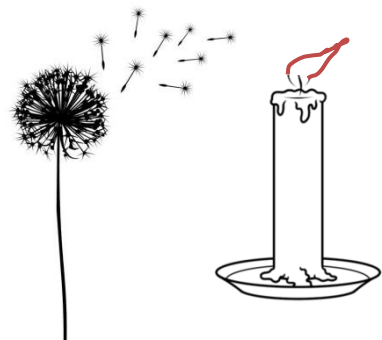
Doing this will help you to climb stairs at a steady pace, without having to stop to catch your breath. It may also reduce the time you need to recover your breath once you have reached the top.

## Visual imagery

**Inhale:** Smell the rose



**Exhale:** Blow the dandelion or candle

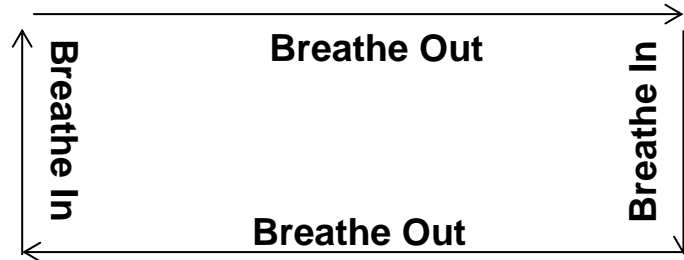




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## Rectangle breathing

Look for something rectangular and follow the shape with your eyes. Breathe in on the short side, breathe out on the long side. Breathe in through your nose. Breathe out through your mouth or nose, whichever feels more comfortable.



## Calming Hand



The calming hand is used to regain control of your breathing by following this 5 step guide using your fingers. It can be used discretely anywhere and at any time you feel yourself becoming breathless.

1. Take hold of your thumb. Recognise that you are becoming breathless but that you will control it
2. Breathe out a long sigh
3. Slowly breathe in
4. Slowly breathe out
5. Gently stretch fingers and wrists fully and feel how your breathlessness has improved

You may repeat the calming hand until you feel your breathlessness subside

For further information please discuss with your ward Physiotherapist or call the office on 01793 605126 Monday to Friday 8:00-16:30, this has an answerphone service if the office is unmanned.

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