

Advice on Breathlessness




This booklet will provide you with basic advice to help you or the person important to you manage breathlessness



Coping with breathlessness

Many people may experience breathlessness at some point in their life. However, it can still be frightening, uncomfortable and feel difficult to manage for the sufferer and their carers, friends and family.

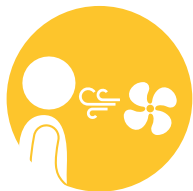


How can I help someone having a breathlessness episode?

- Creating a draft of air reduces the sensation of breathlessness. This can be done by:
 - Opening a window
 - Placing a standing fan or desk fan near the person
 - Giving the person a handheld fan to use when they feel breathless
- Cooling the face with a cool damp cloth or applying a water mist spray
- Massaging the person's back during an episode of breathlessness can encourage muscular relaxation and may be comforting.
- Speaking to the person in a calming manner and offer reassurance that the episode will pass.
- Trying to offer distractions away from the subject of breathing can also be helpful. See breathing techniques

16 Tips for living with breathlessness

- 1 Plan your day in advance and move at a comfortable pace. Ensure you have plenty of opportunities to stop and rest.
- 2 Use walking aids for support.
- 3 Break down your activities into smaller tasks that are more manageable.
- 4 Climb stairs slowly using the handrail, stopping and resting as required.
- 5 Place items that you use frequently in easy-to-reach places. Ensure mobiles are charged and nearby.
- 6 Find simple ways to cook, clean and do other chores. You could use a small table or cart with wheels to move things around your home.
- 7 Hold a handheld battery fan near your face (about 6 inches) – this should help you feel less breathless.
- 8 Keep your clothes loose and wear clothes and shoes that are easy to put on and take off.
- 9 Eat slowly. Keep meals small and frequent and sip fluids regularly.
- 10 Don't be afraid to ask for support when you need it.
- 11 Be patient with yourself and give yourself time to do things. Try to recognise the things you are achieving.
- 12 Correct / comfortable positioning in the bed or chair is important.
- 13 Sitting upright allows gravity to assist the lungs to work.
- 14 Sitting forward and resting your arms on a table or secure surface with the wrists relaxed allows more air flow to the lungs.
- 15 Whilst in bed make sure you are fully over on your side. Resting your upper arm on a pillow may also help.
- 16 Lean onto any fixed surface such as a wall, railing, window sill or worktop. Using / utilising a walking aid, shopping trolley or long umbrella may also help. Alternatively, you can support yourself by placing your hands on your hips. Try to avoid slumping.



Breathing Techniques

Relaxed tummy breathing

Relaxed tummy breathing is sometimes known as 'breathing control'. The aim is to move from fast, panicky, upper chest breathing to relaxed, slow, tummy breathing. This technique helps to make your breathing as efficient as possible by focusing on breathing from your diaphragm, with the upper chest relaxed.

Relaxed tummy breathing may help you recover from breathlessness more quickly after activity. It may also help your breathing to settle if you are feeling stressed. You may wish to use this breathing method with a handheld fan and in a position that eases breathlessness.

The three Rs of relaxed tummy breathing

- 1 As you breathe in rise the tummy so it expands outwards
- 2 Relax the breath out
- 3 Rest and wait for the next breath to come

Rise

Relax

Rest

Breathing from the tummy may not come naturally. Practising relaxed tummy breathing when you are not breathless for 10 minutes, at least twice a day, will help you master the technique.

Before practising, make sure you are in a comfortable position with your head and back supported, and your shoulders and upper chest relaxed. Place one hand on your tummy. Feel the tummy rise and expand as you breathe in and relax down as you breathe out. Breathe gently when practising; there should only be a slight movement of your tummy at rest.

“Breathe low and slow, relax, let go”

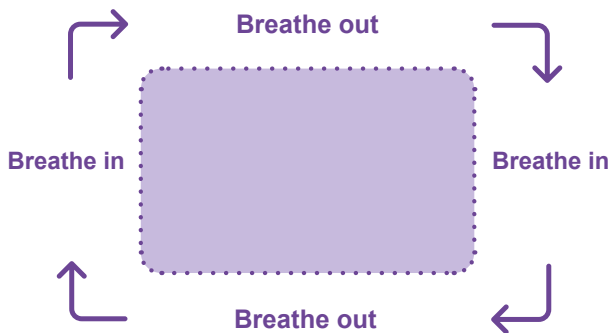
If you tend to breathe with small, fast breaths from the top of your chest, you may find taking slower, deeper breaths from your tummy helps to ease breathlessness.

Breathing Techniques

Breathe a rectangle

When practising relaxed tummy breathing, some people like to imagine a rectangle.

Wherever you are, there is often a rectangle to be seen, whether this is a book, TV, computer or tablet screen, a door, window, table top or even a picture on the wall. Follow the sides of the rectangle with your eyes as you breathe / fill your tummy with breath. Gradually slow the speed at which your eyes move around the edge of the rectangle to slow your breathing.



Recovery breathing

Use recovery breathing when you feel extremely breathless or panicky and you are unable to use relaxed tummy breathing.

How it works

Recovery breathing allows more time for the air to leave your lungs as you breathe out, therefore creating more room for the next breath in. The aim of recovery breathing is to calm your breathing until you can breathe smoothly and quietly from your tummy again.

The three Fs of recovery breathing

- Fan
- Forward-lean position
- Focus on long or relaxed breaths out

Fan

Forward

Focus

Breathing Techniques

Pursed lip breathing

Some people find breathing in through the nose and out through narrowed lips helps to ease their breathlessness.

This technique tends to help people who have conditions such as COPD or emphysema. People who find this technique beneficial often use it instinctively without realising they are doing it.

Pursed lip breathing helps to keep the airways open, thereby allowing the air to leave the lungs more easily. This creates more room for the next breath in. You can use pursed lip breathing at the same time as relaxed tummy breathing or recovery breathing.

Medication

Medication can also be given to relieve breathlessness.

These may be opioid medications, such as Morphine or Oxycodone or medications called benzodiazepines, such as Lorazepam. They can be discussed with your doctor or nurse and used during a breathlessness episode.



**For further
assistance
and advice**

Contact us

If you would like more advice or support
please contact St Raphael's Hospice
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