

The Myton Hospices

Fatigue and Breathlessness



Living with a condition that causes breathlessness can be distressing and frightening and this may be worsened at the moment due to fears relating to the coronavirus COVID-19.

During the current coronavirus outbreak, you may have reduced access to your usual support networks. It is important that you continue the usual treatments for your underlying conditions.

The aim of this leaflet is to give you some advice and practical techniques to help you manage your breathlessness and fatigue.

If you are unwell and think you might have coronavirus COVID-19, please use the online coronavirus service 111.nhs.uk for advice on what to do. If you are not able to use the online service then please phone 111.

Breathlessness Explained

Evidence suggests that how breathless you feel does not always match up with how well you are getting air into your lungs. Many conditions cause symptoms of breathlessness. Fear, anxiety, activity and poor breathing habits can affect how breathless you feel.



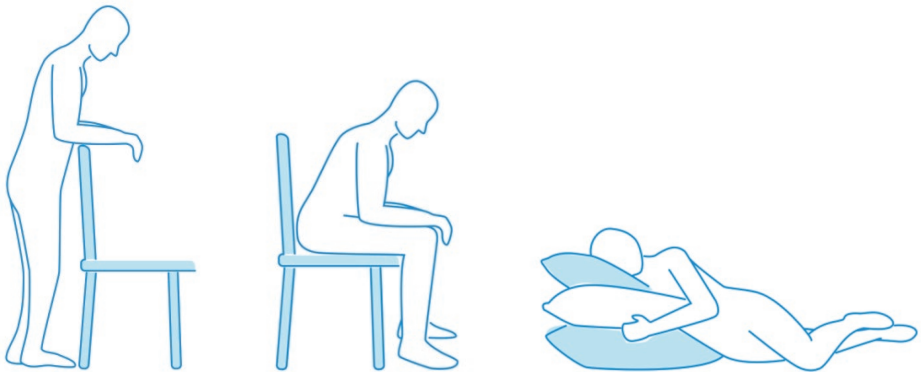
The techniques and advice in this leaflet can help you to feel more confident in managing your symptoms of breathlessness and fatigue.

Helpful Tips and Techniques

Practice the following techniques when you are at your least breathless so that they gradually become more automatic. Practising techniques regularly will make them easier to do when you are feeling breathless.

Positioning

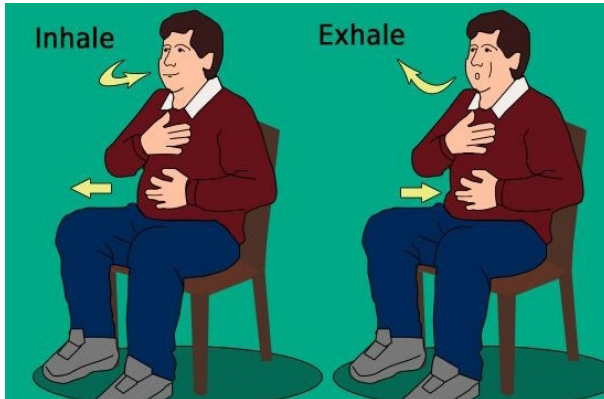
Finding a comfortable position can ease breathlessness. A forward position leaning on your arms, can be helpful as this helps the muscles involved in breathing to work better.



Relaxed Breathing/Breathing Control

You can change the way you breathe to make it more relaxed and efficient.

- Find your comfortable position, breathe gently and try to soften and drop your shoulders with each breath.
- Rest a hand on your tummy and breathe in gently to feel your tummy rise. Then breathe out slowly through your nose or your mouth and feel your tummy fall. Rest and wait for the next breath to come.

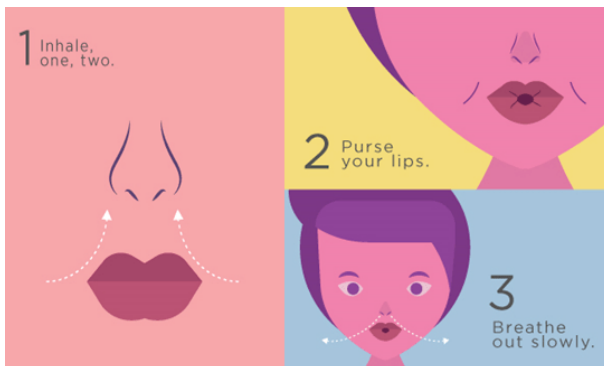


Stomach pushes out

Stomach pulls in

When you are comfortable with the 'relaxed breathing', try to slow down the speed of your breathing. When you slow down, your breathing becomes deeper and more efficient. Imagine air filling your tummy like a balloon.

You may find it helpful to purse your lips while you breathe out slowly as though you were making a candle flicker.



Sourced from healthline.com

Rectangular Breathing

- Find something rectangular to look at such as a window, door or the TV.
- Let your eyes follow the edges of the rectangle, breathing in on the short sides and out on the long sides. Focus on the longer outward breath.
- Gradually slow down your breathing as you feel able, until you feel calmer and your breathing is more under control.



Cooling the Face

Cooling the face, especially around the mouth and nose, can help reduce how breathless you feel.

- Try wiping a cool wet flannel on your nose and upper cheeks of your face.
- Holding a hand held fan approximately 15cm from your face and directing the flow towards the central part of your face can help reduce feelings of breathlessness.

Due to the coronavirus outbreak we would recommend that if you choose to use a hand held fan that you do so only within your own home and when you are alone or with a family member that is living with you. Using a fan in the presence of others may increase the risk of spreading infection.

Be more Physically Active

Keeping active can help to maintain your strength and stamina. It is ok to feel more breathless during activity and the techniques and tips given to you in this leaflet will help give you the confidence to manage your breathlessness. The Physiotherapist who calls you will be able to discuss your current activity levels and recommend appropriate exercises if required.



Please do not forget that it is okay to ask for help. Please continue to contact your usual health and social care teams if you need further support.

Additional advice

- Avoid breath holding in activities, such as climbing the stairs or bending.
- **'Blow as you go'** ie breath out on effort for example blow out when bending, lifting, reaching or standing up from a chair.
- Consider a walking stick or rollator to help stabilise your shoulders when walking.

Although it may not be possible to change what is happening in the lungs or heart, we can always control how we think, feel and behave.

Fatigue

Most people who experience chronic breathlessness often experience fatigue.

What is Fatigue?

Fatigue can be described as an extreme, persistent tiredness that can impact on everyday activities. It can feel overwhelming and is often not improved by rest.

How can Fatigue affect you?

Fatigue may impact on you physically, as well as, cognitively, behaviourally and emotionally.

Some common symptoms are:

- Being unable to summon the energy to do even small daily tasks
- Avoiding socialising because it is too much effort
- Having trouble remembering things and difficulty making decisions
- Feeling impatient with others, affecting your relationships with family and friends

What causes fatigue?

Fatigue can have many causes, including disease progression, anaemia, pain, anxiety and depression. It can also be caused by some medications and side effects of treatment.

What can you do to help manage it?

Be realistic, know your limitations and recognise your triggers. Think of your energy like a battery and give it a chance to 're-charge.' This can be done by balancing periods of physical activity, rest and relaxation. You can also use energy conservation techniques

Energy Conservation

Energy conservation means finding the easiest way of doing a task, while using the least amount of energy.

Energy conservation can be broken down into five main areas:

Prioritise

When you have a limited amount of energy available to you, make sure you use it on the activities that are the most important to you.



Plan

Try and spread tasks throughout the week, rather than fitting them all into one day. Plan rest and relaxation times to prevent yourself becoming over-fatigued. Plan individual activities so they can be completed in the most energy efficient way, including social activities (eg meeting a friend).

Pace

Slow your overall speed when completing a task, and break it down into manageable chunks which can be completed at different times. Be aware of your limitations. Stop and rest before you become overtired.

Posture

Reduce unnecessary bending and reaching. Sit where possible to complete a task.

Permission

Consider whether you feel able to accept help with some activities.

Physical Activity

Physical activity is important as it helps your body to be as fit as it can be, and work in the most efficient way.

Physical activity can help to improve your mood and feelings of well-being. This can also help reduce your fatigue levels.

Relaxation

Relaxation can help with tension and anxiety. If you are tense and anxious your body will use more energy.

Relaxation changes the physiological response in our bodies. It activates the parasympathetic nervous system which supports our immune system, enables us to digest food, and conserves energy supplies.

Relaxation can take a number of forms and will be personal to you.



Effective fatigue management is a balance between energy conservation, physical activity and relaxation.

During a consultation with our Occupational Therapist she will be able to advise you on techniques, tips and adapted equipment that may help conserve your energy during everyday activities.

Notes:

This page has been left blank for you to write anything down that you may want to make a note of to do with your fatigue and breathlessness.

Acknowledgements

Information adapted from Cambridge Breathlessness Intervention Service with kind permission.

Pictures courtesy of The British Lung Foundation www.blf.org.uk.
Managing breathlessness at home during the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak: NIHR Applied Research Collaborative Palliative and End of Life Care Theme. April 3rd 2020.

Useful links and resources

Managing Breathlessness:

<https://www.stchristophers.org.uk/video-breathlessness-breathing/>
<https://www.stchristophers.org.uk/video-breathlessness-functioning/>
<https://www.stchristophers.org.uk/video-breathlessness-thinking/>
<https://www.stchristophers.org.uk/video-breathlessness-attacks/>

Using the handheld fan:

<https://vimeo.com/75201124>

Relaxation:

https://soundcloud.com/cuh_nhs/body-relaxation-scripts
https://soundcloud.com/cuh_nhs/letting-go-relaxation-scripts

Tai Chi:

Tai Chi Exercises in a Seated Position: <https://youtu.be/lspaav6NkA8>
Tai Chi in Seated Position Part 2: <https://youtu.be/90X6FDwAveg>
Tai Chi in Seated Position Part 3 : https://youtu.be/W_ONy8z4mXU

Seated Exercises from British Lung Foundation:

<https://vimeo.com/413976957>