

# Coping with Breathlessness

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## Coping with breathlessness

Breathlessness is a normal feeling that any person will experience if they exert themselves. People with lung disease often find that this sensation is brought on more rapidly with minimal exertion. There are various techniques described in this patient information that can help relieve breathlessness. If you practice these on a daily basis they will help you when you get short of breath.

## Breathing control

This means breathing gently in through your nose and out through your mouth or nose, using the least effort. By reducing and minimising the effort you will use less of your oxygen intake for the work of breathing. Breathe at the rate which is most comfortable with your arms supported and your shoulders and hands relaxed. Try doing this in one of the positions shown below and overleaf.

## Techniques for when you are more active

- **Relaxed slow deep breathing**  
Gently try to slow down your breathing and breathe more deeply. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- **Pursed lip breathing**  
Breathe out with your lips pursed, as if you are whistling. This slows your breathing down and helps to make it more efficient.
- **“Blow as you go”**  
Try to time your breathing so that you breathe out during the part of the activity that requires the most effort e.g. reaching for something on a shelf, bending down, going up a step or stairs and whilst standing up. By doing this it will ensure that you are not holding your breath which would increase the feeling of breathlessness.
- **Paced breathing**  
This involves breathing in and out in time with the activity you are doing, such as walking or climbing stairs. Do this in a rhythm that suits you. This will depend on how breathless you are. Here are some examples: breathe in when on the stair, breathe out as you go up the stair, or breathe in for one stair and out for one stair, or breathe in for one stair and out for two, or breathe in for two stairs and out for three.

## Positions

Each of the following positions will support your shoulders and upper chest so that you are using the least energy or effort.

Sitting back



Sitting leaning forwards



Sitting at a table



Standing leaning forward



Standing leaning back



## Pacing yourself

You may no longer be able to do your daily routine at your previous pace. In which case go at your own pace when doing activities and try to plan your day so that any strenuous activities are spread out.

## Other suggestions

- Use your inhaler if your breathing does not settle quickly or if you are wheezy or your chest is tight.
- Try to remain calm when you are breathless, panicking will make it worse.
- Do not delay in seeking medical advice whenever you feel it is necessary.

## Physiotherapy contact details

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Physiotherapy departments

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