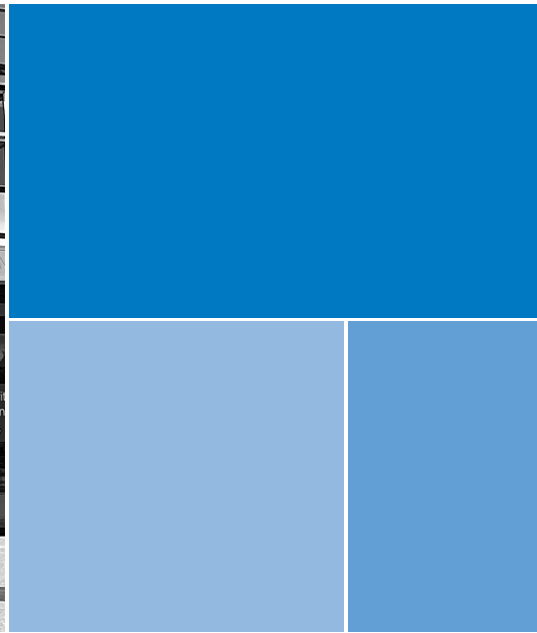




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Managing my Breathlessness



Patient Information

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What is breathlessness?

Getting breathless is normal and can impact everyone differently. Breathlessness is an uncomfortable feeling of being unable to catch your breath and can be caused by a variety of things.

Getting out of breath can be frightening and can cause anxiety. This booklet aims to help you manage your breathlessness and allow you to engage with daily activities.

There are healthcare professionals that can support you with managing your breathlessness, for example: occupational therapists, physiotherapists and respiratory nurses.

Why am I breathless?

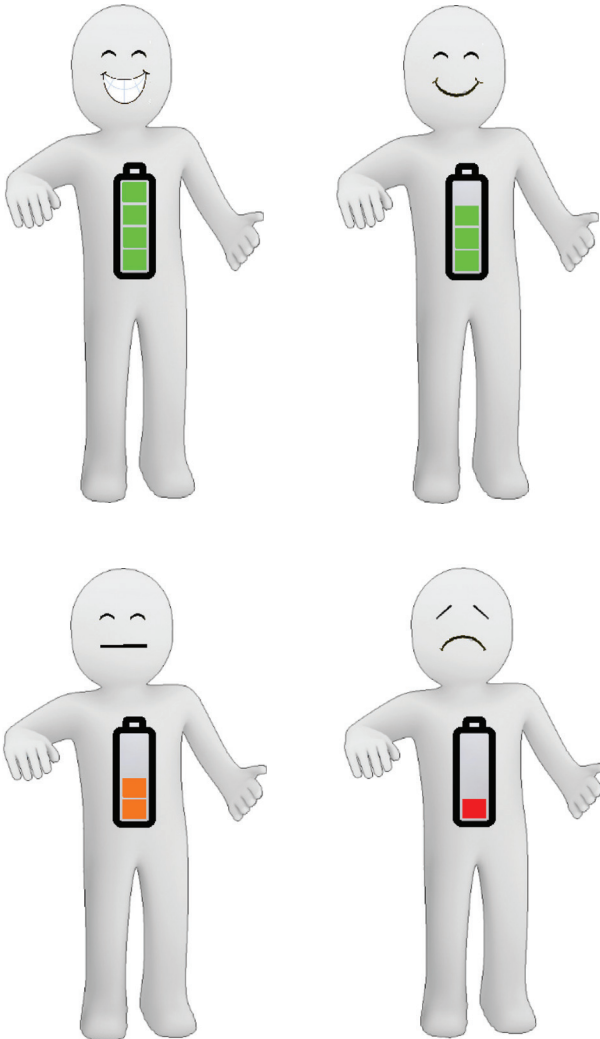
Breathlessness is often a symptom of an underlying condition. This can include:

- Lung conditions, e.g. COPD/asthma
- Heart conditions
- Reduced physical fitness
- Anxiety
- Infection

If there is a sudden change in your condition, contact your GP or healthcare professional for further advice.

Managing your breathlessness

Energy levels



With each daily activity your energy levels will reduce. It is important to pace yourself to save your energy. You cannot function without energy.

The 3 Ps: Pace, Plan and Prioritise

Pace

- Break activities into smaller tasks and spread them throughout the day
- Rest between activities and incorporate rests throughout your day
- Adjust activities to reduce the energy demand

Plan

- Plan ahead as much as possible
- Measure and track your energy use to help plan routines
- Where possible keep items within reach wherever possible

Prioritise

- Prioritise what is important to you
- Delegate tasks where possible
- Find activities that help you feel energised

Example of the 3Ps: Washing

When you live with breathlessness, it is important that you learn how best to

Pace	Plan	Prioritise
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sit to complete washing tasks• Use a towelling robe rather than using a towel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep all items needed close by• Ensure mirror is at face level	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use dry shampoo to reduce washing your hair as often• Consider using electric items, e.g. electric toothbrush

Have a go at using the 3 Ps...

Pace	Plan	Prioritise

Positions of ease for breathlessness

When breathing becomes difficult, there are several positions that you might find helpful. The best positions are the ones which need the least energy or effort.

Side lying

Lie on your side with pillows supporting your head. Your knees should be slightly bent. You can increase the number of pillows under your head if required.



Sitting

- a) Sit in a chair with your arms resting on the armrests. If your chair does not have an armrest, rest your hands on your thighs. Ensure your wrists and hands are relaxed.

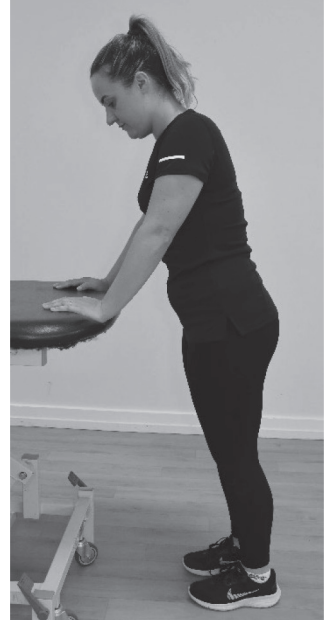


- b) In a chair sit leaning forwards and rest your forearms and head on a pillow on a table.



Standing

- a) When standing, lean forward from the hips with your forearms or hands resting on something solid and at the right height, e.g. chair or kitchen worktop or frame.



- b) Stand with your back leaning against a wall, with your feet hip width apart. Make sure to relax your shoulders and hands. You can lean forward slightly and rest your hands on your thighs.



Breathing control

When living with breathlessness, there are techniques that can be used to help you feel in control of your breathing and allow you to breathe more efficiently.

If you practice these techniques, it will help you when completing everyday tasks.

When completing the breathing control exercise, it is important to find a quiet place free from distractions. Make sure you are in a comfortable position either sitting or standing.

1. Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach.
2. Slowly breathe in through your nose, you should feel your stomach move out against your hand and your chest remain still.
3. Breathe out slowly through your mouth with pursed lips.
4. Repeat this cycle until you feel your breathing rate gradually slow, and you feel more in control of your breathing.

When completing the breath in and out use as little effort as possible, making your breath slow and relaxed.

Remember the 3Rs:

Rise the tummy as you breathe in

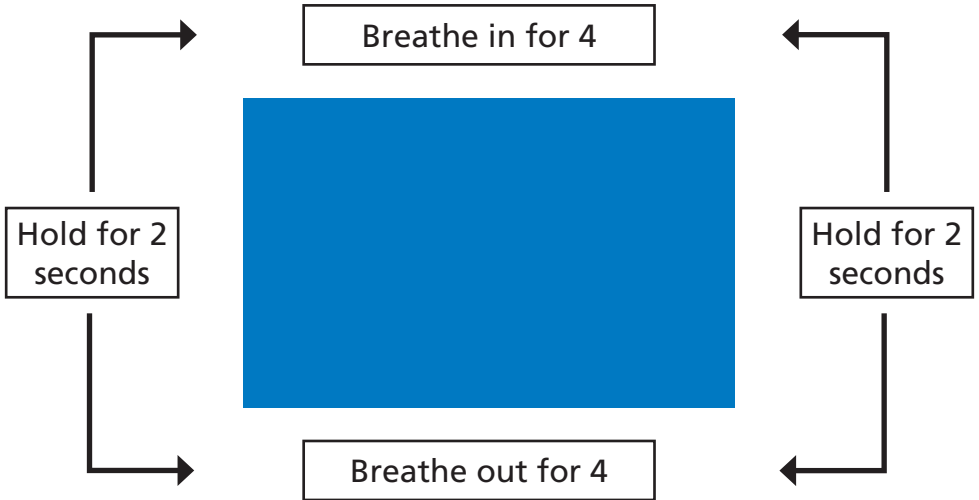
Relax your breath out

Rest and repeat the cycle

Breathing rectangle

The breathing rectangle is another technique that can be used to help you control your breathlessness.

This technique can be used by visualising or looking at any four-sided object, e.g. a window or television.



Scan for video



Breathing techniques

When completing breathing control, you might find adding in these techniques to be helpful. Try to find which technique works best for you.

Pursed lip breathing

This technique can be used at any time to help control your breathing. Pursed lip breathing helps by slowing your breathing rate and making your breathing more efficient.

'Purse' your lips as if you were going to whistle, blow a kiss or gently blow out a candle.

1. Take a breath in through your nose "smell the roses".
2. Breathe out through pursed lips "blow out the candle".

Scan for video



Fan therapy

Research has shown that using a fan to cool your face is effective at reducing breathlessness.

Hold or place the fan approximately six inches away from your face, use the fan until you feel your breathlessness ease.

You can use a handheld/desktop fan or open windows to allow a breeze.

Blow as you go technique

This technique makes everyday activities such as getting on/off a chair easier. You can use this with pursed lip breathing.

1. Breathe in before completing the effortful task.
2. Breathe out while you complete the effortful task.

For example: Breathe in before as you prepare to stand, and breathe out as you stand up from the chair.

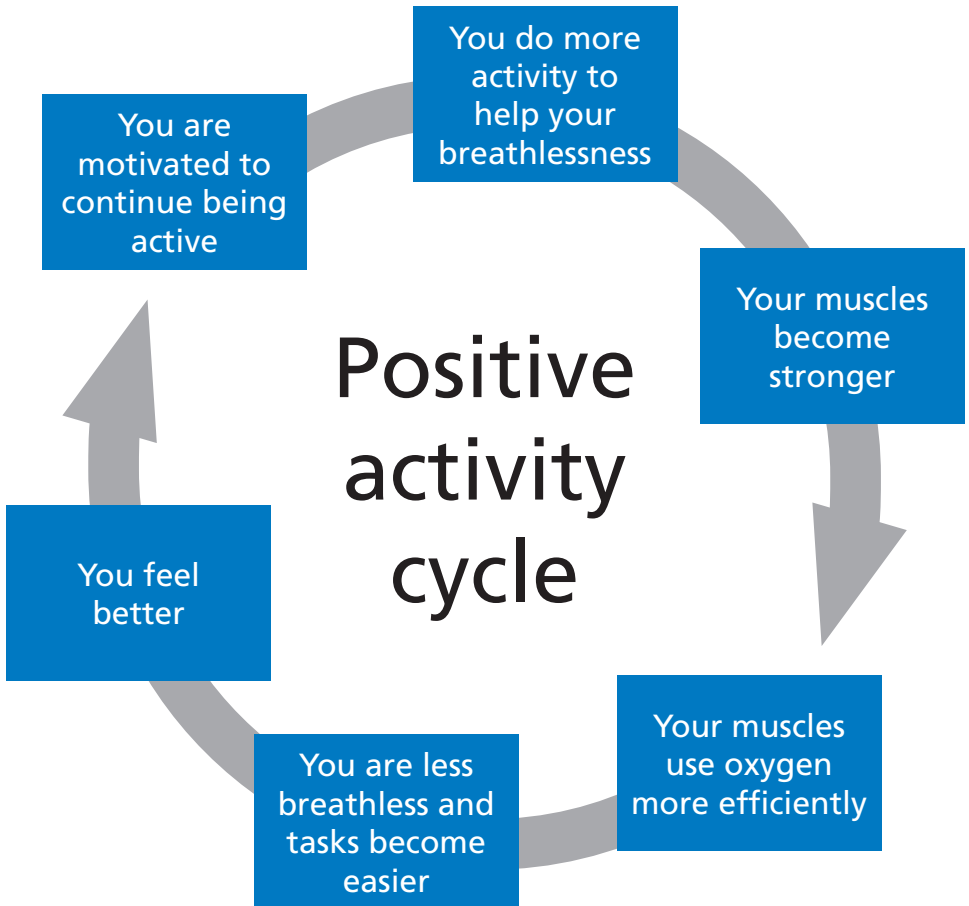
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Living with breathlessness

Living with breathlessness can be difficult; however, it is important to try and remain as active as possible to ensure you are able to do the activities that are important to you.

Doing an activity will help your muscles to become stronger. Your muscles will use oxygen more efficiently, making it easier to do the activities that are important to you. This will mean that you will feel less breathless completing these tasks.



Managing stairs

You might be anxious about walking up and down stairs, especially if completing these has caused you to become short of breath in the past.

Using the breathing techniques such as blow as you go and pursed lip breathing can help you to control your breathlessness and make managing the stairs easier.

When completing the stairs you might find the following useful:

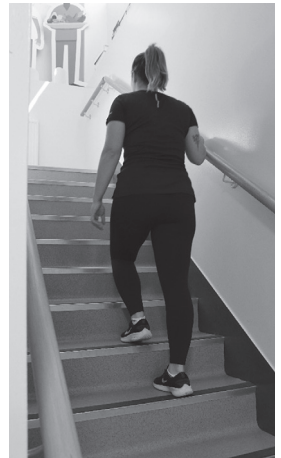
1. Blow as you go - breathe in for one step and breathe out for two steps.
2. Take one step at a time.
3. Use the banister to support you.
4. Take time to recover.
5. Pace yourself.

Using the 3 Ps when completing the stairs will help manage your breathlessness:

Pace yourself when completing the stairs.

Plan your daily activities to reduce the amount of times you need to complete the stairs.

Prioritise what is important to you.



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Incontinence

Sometimes when you get severely breathless it may feel as if you are going to lose bladder or bowel control. The use of the techniques in this booklet may help reduce these sensations. If you are experiencing these symptoms speak to your healthcare professional, who will be able to provide additional information and support.

Sex and breathlessness

Breathlessness can impact your relationships and sexual activities, but it does not need to. For further information visit:

<https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/living-with/sex/having-sex>

Eating healthily and managing your weight

Eating

1. Sit upright when you eat

Maintaining a good position is important. Slumping can exacerbate breathlessness by applying pressure to the diaphragm. Therefore, consume food while sitting upright, ideally at a table.

2. Try easy-to-chew foods

Softer or easier-to-chew foods can help you save energy and breathe more easily. Soft and moist foods include soups, cottage pies and fish pies.

Use gravy and sauces, for example, parsley sauce or cheese sauce.

Serve puddings with custard or cream.

3. Smaller meals

Have smaller meals with frequent snacks, rather than three larger meals. Aim to eat five to six times per day (three small meals and two to three nourishing snacks).

4. Meal timings

Try scheduling your meals to a time that you have the most energy. For example, if you feel fatigued later in the day, try to eat earlier.

5. Eat and chew slowly

Take deep breaths during your meal to replenish your body's oxygen supply. Take smaller bites with breaks in-between. If you are out of breath, slow down and take a rest.

6. Stay hydrated

Ensure you are drinking six to eight glasses of water throughout the day as dehydration can contribute to shortness of breath.

Are you carrying excess weight?

Maintaining a healthy weight can help you manage your breathlessness.

Increased weight around your neck, chest and stomach can make breathing difficult, as it limits the air your lungs can hold whilst you inhale. There are lots of support and resources available to help you to lose weight.

“Tips to help you lose weight” and “Lose weight - better health” on the NHS website for advice on weight loss advice.

NHS digital weight management programme for 12 weeks (if you are obese with a diagnosis of high blood pressure and/or diabetes).

Speak to your GP/pharmacy team for more information on support available in your area.

Losing weight unintentionally?

If you are losing weight without meaning to because of poor appetite or fatigue this can contribute to your breathlessness. The following tips may help you increase your energy intake and reduce your breathlessness:

1. Food enrichment

Add cream, crème fraîche, butter and cheese to your meals.

2. Nourishing drinks

Use double cream, ice cream and/or full fat milk to make nourishing milkshakes, hot chocolates and other drinks. You can add high fat foods such as avocados and/or nut butters to smoothies.

3. Nourishing snacks

Aim for two to three soft snacks per day.

Sweet options: Tinned fruit in syrup, rice pudding, mousse, full-fat yogurt or sponge pudding with custard.

Savory options: Soft boiled eggs with mayonnaise and melt-in-the-mouth crisps (Skips, Wotsits, Quavers).

4. Do not skip meals

Even if you are not hungry, do not skip meals. Missing meals causes your energy levels to drop, reducing your appetite. Make sure you plan, pace and prioritise when making meals to reduce breathlessness.

Please ask your GP or specialist nurse to refer you to a dietitian for further advice if you have any concerns about losing weight without meaning to.

Talking on the telephone

Rushing to answer the telephone can make your breathlessness worse. Here are some tips you might find helpful.

- Make your family and friends aware that it might take you longer to answer the telephone
- Have a mobile or hands-free telephone that can be with you at all times
- Take regular breaks or pauses after a few sentences
- Try to sit down when speaking on the telephone
- Speak at a slow steady pace and try speaking in shorter sentences

Bending

Bending from the waist can make breathing difficult and can increase your breathlessness. Here are some tips you might find helpful.

- Bend from the knees rather than the waist. Try to keep your chest upright and shoulders back
- Try using small aids such as a long-handle shoehorn or helping hand grabber to reduce the need to bend down
- Try sitting down when needing to work at a low level, e.g. emptying the washing machine
- Try to keep items that you use regularly at a reachable level

Medications and breathlessness

Medications are a small part of managing your breathlessness. Your healthcare professional will be able to provide further information on what may be helpful for you.

Useful resources and references

Asthma and Lung UK

Website: asthmaandlung.org.uk
Helpline: 0300 222 5800
Email: helpline@asthmaandlung.org.uk

British Heart Foundation

Website: www.bhf.org.uk
Helpline: 0300 330 3311
Email: heartmatters@bhf.org.uk

Macmillan Cancer Support

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk
Helpline: 0808 808 0000
Support Care Hub: 0300 1000 200

Video links

Breathing rectangle with pursed lips

<https://youtu.be/GMQYREkLUOU>

Pursed lip breathing

<https://youtu.be/cUghUnc-8iU>

Blow as you go - standing from a chair

<https://youtu.be/Ukd3lrMQ2BE>

Managing stairs

<https://youtu.be/uBEuygDZCUc>

Leaflet developed jointly by:

- Dietitians
- Cardiac nurses
- Palliative care team
- Respiratory nursing team
- Respiratory physiotherapists
- Respiratory occupational therapists

Notes

PACE yourself and take your time,
remember a moderate pace gets you further

Your Feedback We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible - talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/department staff are unable to resolve it, then ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care.

OUR VALUES

Proud of the Paget

Collaboration

We work positively with others to achieve shared aims

Accountability

We act with professionalism and integrity, delivering what we commit to, embedding learning when things do not go to plan

Respect

We are anti-discriminatory, treating people fairly and creating a sense of belonging and pride

Empowerment

We speak out when things don't feel right, we are innovative and make changes to support continuous improvement

Support

We are compassionate, listen attentively and are kind to ourselves and each other

Before leaving please complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.

Help us transform NHS services and to support patient choice.



The hospital can arrange for an interpreter or person to sign to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay. Please let us know.

For a large print version of this leaflet, contact PALS 01493 453240

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