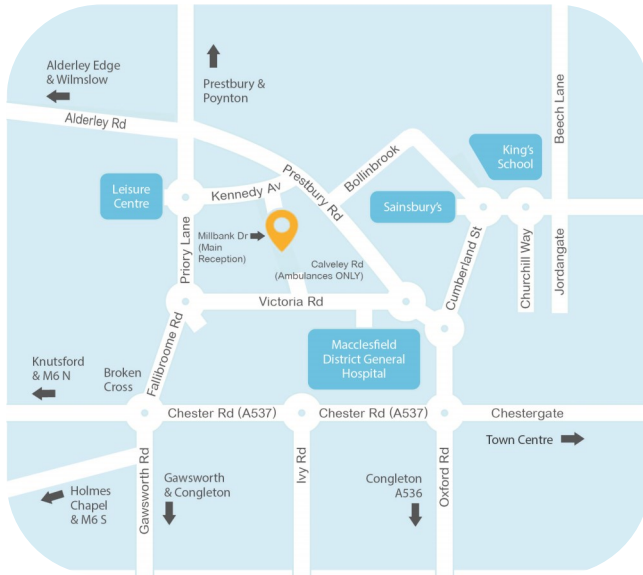




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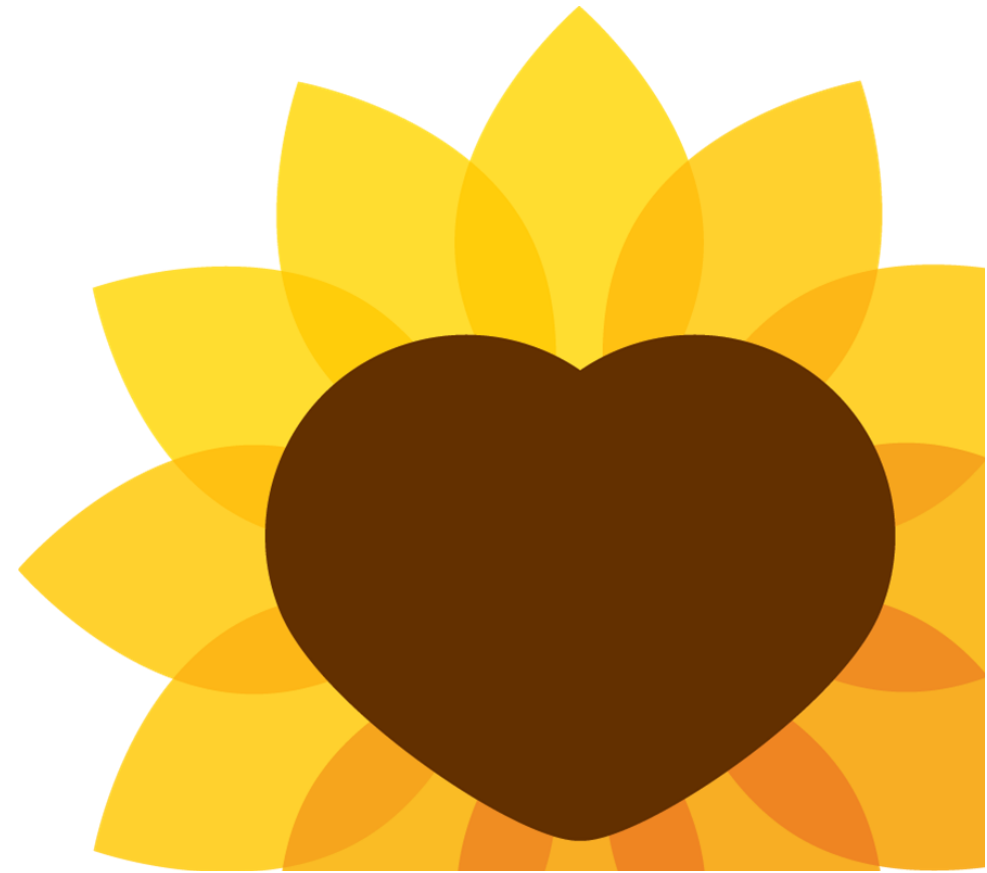
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Breathlessness

A practical guide to help you
manage your breathing



Introduction

Breathlessness can occur for a variety of reasons and can be very distressing; interfering with many or all aspects of everyday life. There are many simple strategies that can help relieve your breathlessness and allow you to feel more in control.

Natural reactions to feeling breathless

A natural reaction to breathlessness is to breathe more rapidly and use the upper chest and shoulders to help us breathe in. as well as these physical reactions, there is often an emotional response of feeling anxious, panicky and or out of control.

If these reactions are prolonged, they often make us feel worse, as we are using more oxygen and energy to breathe than is necessary.

Relaxed, lower chest breathing

Sit comfortably, supported in a chair or propped up in bed. Relax any tense muscles, drop your shoulders if they are hunched and release any tensing in your jaw and hands.

As you relax your muscles, allow yourself to breathe out slowly.

Rest your hands on your lower chest at the bottom of your ribcage. Gently breathe in through your nose, feeling your hands move out a little. Then sigh out slowly through your nose or mouth.

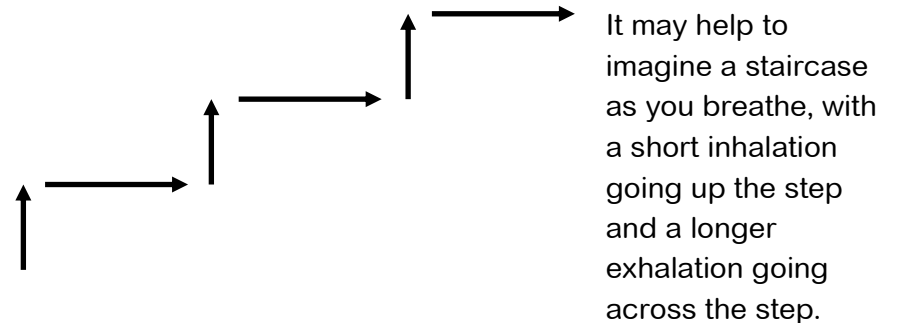
Repeat this 3 or 4 times, making sure your breath out is always longer than your breath in. try to practice this several times a day, or whenever you feel breathless.

Using a fan

The feeling of moving air can be very helpful. Try directing a hand-held or table fan at the side of your face or sitting beside an open window.

Focusing on the edge of a rectangle can help control breathlessness and panic. Examples of rectangles include TV screens, magazines and windows. Start with a long breath out on the long edge, then a shorter breath in, longer out and so on

Breathing staircase



Distraction Techniques

These can help if you feel anxious or panicky about your breathing:

- Focus your mind on a familiar scene e.g. at home, in the garden, or somewhere you visited on holiday, and use all your senses to see this place in great detail in your mind
- Recite the words of a song or poem
- Try doing puzzles such as jigsaws, crosswords or Sudoku
- Listen to music or watch TV
- Try a relaxation CD. These are available from the Hospice
- Keep practicing the lower chest breathing as mentioned before. Concentrate on long, relaxed sighs out.

For more information see the 'Panic in Breathlessness' booklet

You might also benefit from using walking aids to help reduce your breathlessness. Some walking aids have seats to rest on or baskets to help when you are shopping.

Stairs

Remember to pace yourself. Try to breathe out on the effort of stepping up. It may help to stop after every couple of steps. Keep using your lower chest breathing and focus on a long breath out every time you step up. If you have a landing, it may be helpful to put a chair there to rest on.

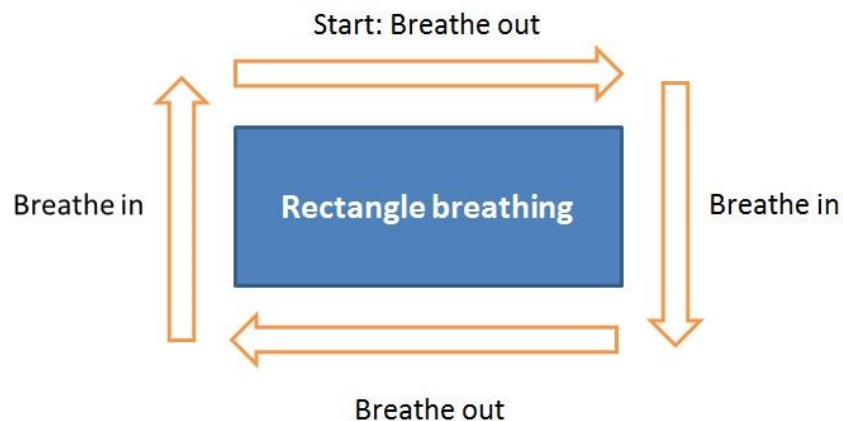
Ways of Managing breathlessness

Relaxation

Try to put some time aside everyday to practise relaxation. It may help to listen to a relaxation CD or some relaxing music. Sit comfortably in a supported position; allow your face, shoulders, arms and legs to gently relax and practice your lower chest breathing for a few minutes.

You may also benefit from receiving a complementary therapy such as aromatherapy, massage or Reiki.

Rectangle Breathing



Positioning

There are several positions that can help you breathe in a more relaxed way:

Sitting supported

Try placing a pillow under each arm to help your shoulders relax, make sure your feet are on the floor.



Forward-lean sitting

Try leaning forward onto a table, with a pillow under your arms. This can help 'splint' open the bottom of your chest to make breathing easier.



Forward-lean standing

Try leaning on the kitchen unit, on railings or on the back of a chair.



Supported lying

Sitting up high in bed with pillows under your arms for support



High side lying

Lying propped up, half on your side, half forwards, with pillows for support.

Gentle massage

Touch can be very reassuring when we are breathless. There are several areas where gentle massage or stroking can help reduce feelings of breathlessness and anxiety.

Gentle stroking across the shoulders by a carer. This can help reinforce a position of relaxation. Gentle stroking across the shoulder or between the shoulder blades can help relax the breathing and reinforce a position of relaxation. A warm heat pack between the shoulder blades can also work well.

Your physiotherapist may have discussed acupuncture or acupressure with you. By stroking along one of the acupuncture channels (meridians), relating to the lung, some relief from breathlessness can be gained. Gently stroke from the front of the shoulder, down the arm, to the thumbnail.



Avoid holding your breath

Often, if we are concentrating on an activity, we unintentionally hold our breath. This can alter the normal rhythm of breathing, causing us to pant to catch our breath later. Try to become aware of times you may do this and instead, allow yourself to breathe evenly, using lower chest-breathing, throughout your activity.

Exercise and activity

It is important to try to maintain a level of activity if possible, to maintain strength & condition in your muscles, heart & lungs and to help maintain independence and encourage better sleep. This may mean generally moving around at home, doing a few chair-based exercises that your physiotherapist can show you or perhaps having a gentle walk.

Breathing when walking

Try to pace yourself. Walk at a speed where you can keep your breathing controlled. Remember to use your lower chest breathing and allow your breaths out to be longer. Sometimes, walking one step breathing in and the next two steps breathing out can be a helpful strategy.

Breathing when talking

Just having a conversation can be tiring and can worsen feelings of breathlessness. Try to speak at a rate you can cope with; hopefully the person you are talking to will also slow down. Also, talking in shorter sentences can be helpful.

Managing everyday activities

Pace yourself with all your activities; allowing recovery time from one to the next and remember to use your lower chest breathing throughout. Try to plan your day ahead of time and include time to rest. Consider tasks that other people could do for you so you can focus on activities that you enjoy doing. Think of ways to save your energy at home e.g. sitting down to brush your teeth, get dressed or prepare meals.

Avoid having to stretch or bend – place frequently used items within easy reach. Avoid lifting heavy items e.g. laundry – maybe split into several smaller loads. Try wrapping yourself in a towelling bathrobe after your bath or shower and sitting for a few moments in a warm room. This will do most of the drying for you. Your physiotherapist or occupational therapist may discuss other energy or breath saving strategies with you or suggest items of equipment that may help. These could include a perching stool in the kitchen or bathroom, or a bath board or shower stool. You could also use aids to help you get in and out of bed, or a trolley to help you move items from room to room.