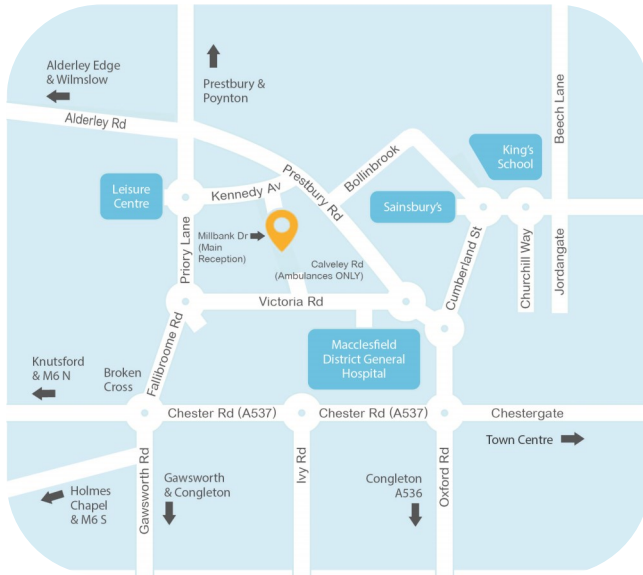




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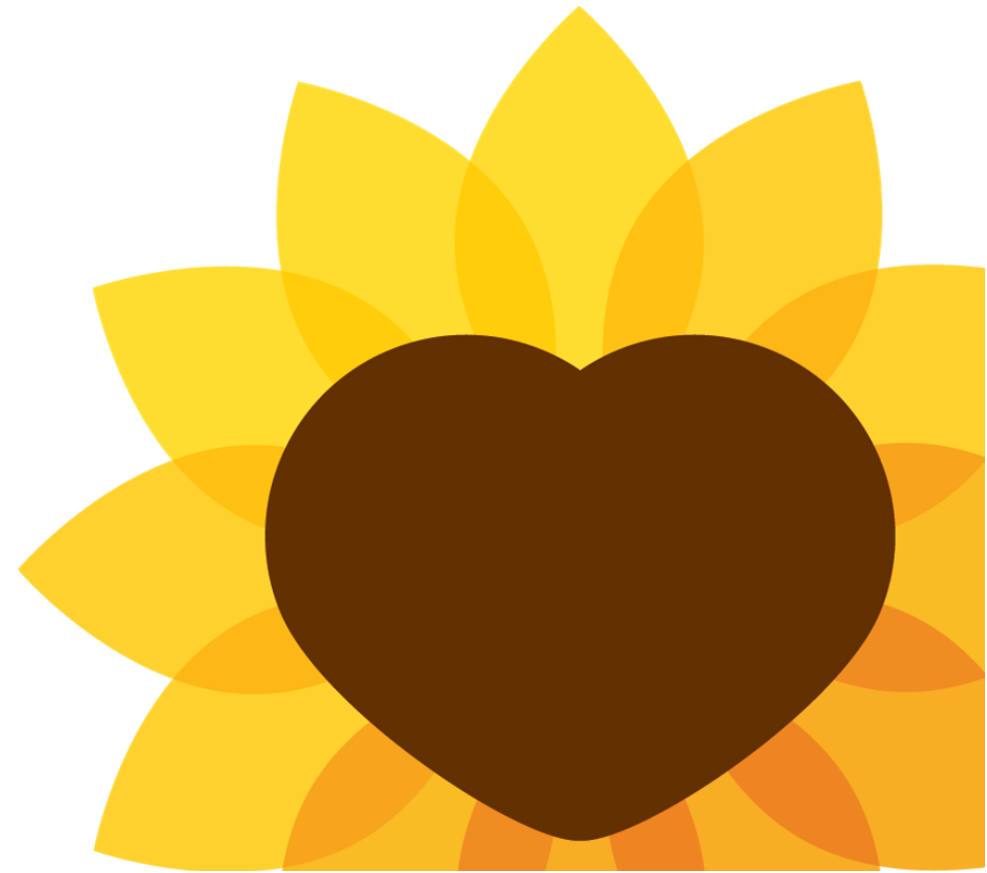


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Panic in Breathlessness



Introduction

Feelings of breathless can trigger a number of symptoms and lead to panic. This is an understandable reaction, but can often make us feel worse, as we are using more energy and oxygen to breathe than is necessary.

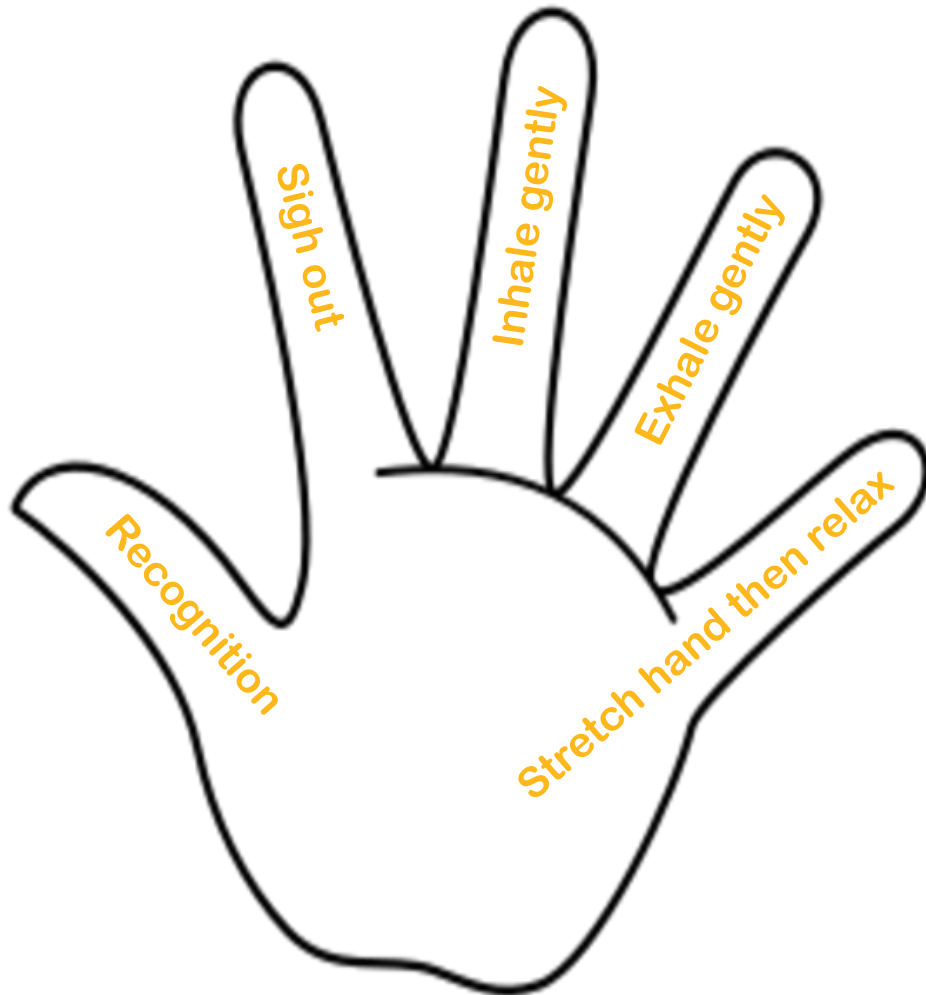


The calming hand is a simple tool to help you cope when you are actually experiencing panic or breathlessness. You can count the steps on your fingers to help you remember what to do next.

- 1) **Acceptance.** Recognise the signs of panic and realise that you can put your strategies into place to help you cope. Hold your thumb while you remind yourself of what to do next.
- 2) **Sigh out.** This simple action will lead to several complex reactions in your body, helping your muscles to relax, giving positive feedback to your brain and helping to slow your heartrate.
- 3) **Inhale & exhale slowly.** Controlled, efficient breathing (as taught in treatment sessions) quickly restores the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide to normal, relieving the sensation of breathlessness.
- 4) **Relax hands—stretch and stop.** This will help to relax the muscles throughout your body in a way that is acceptable behaviour in a public space! No one will need to know what you are doing but it can be very effective.

Calming hand

The calming hand is a tool that can help control panic attacks and breathlessness.



Panic explained

- Panic feels like it will keep increasing until you 'pass out' or even 'drop dead'
- However, even if you do nothing about panic, it will eventually peak and then burn itself out
- Panic is fed by an initial 'trigger' thought, which in this case is the emotional response to feelings of breathlessness
- Stopping the trigger thought can stop the panic before it begins.

Panic is all about feeling out of control. Having strategies in place to help you cope with panic, such as controlled breathing, thought stopping etc. can help you to feel in control and prevent panic before it takes hold.

On the following pages we outline some strategies that might help. It's about finding what works best for you, so why not give them a try and see if they help?

Thought stopping

When an unwanted thought comes into your head and starts to make you feel anxious, stop it in its tracks!

- Place an elastic band on your wrist
- As soon as you notice yourself becoming anxious or thoughts going round in your head, say STOP and ping the band (you can say stop out loud or in your head)
- Count backwards slowly from 10 to 1
- Think of a pleasant thought or image

This sounds like a silly idea but it does work for many people. You need to practice using the technique on your own several times a day. Eventually you will build up an association between feeling the ping of the band on your wrist and being able to control your thoughts.

Mind disciplines

Mind discipline can help you focus your mind away from unwanted thoughts and worries, allowing you to control them rather than have them control you.

Try thinking of one of these things for a few moments to begin with, and then for longer as you become more confident with practice. Imagine every little detail—the colours, scents, sounds, the weather, how you feel etc,

- A picture, photograph or painting
- A room in your house
- A well loved walk or view
- A garden you know well
- Trees blowing in the breeze
- A harbour with boats bobbing up and down
- A favourite piece of music or song
- Reciting a poem or prayer in your head
- Counting backwards slowly from 1000

It can take practice to use these techniques, so be patient with yourself and persevere. If other thoughts come into your head, just recognise them and let them pass, bringing your attention back to your mind discipline.