



We can provide interpreters for a variety of languages, information in larger print or other formats (e.g. audio) - please call us on 01932 723553.

To use the Text Relay service, prefix all numbers with 18802.

اگر نیاز به ترجمہ دارید، لطفاً با شماره 01932 723553 تماس بگیرید۔

ने दुगठु उरनमे ची लेउ वै उं विरथा वरवे इस नंवर उे बेन वरवे: 01932 723553

اگر آپ اس کا اردو زبان میں ترجمہ چاہتے ہیں، تو براہ کرم اس فون نمبر 01932 723553 پر رابطہ کریں

Se precisa de uma tradução por favor contacte: 01932 723553

আপনার অনুবাদের দরকার হলে এখানে যোগাযোগ করুন : 01932 723553

यदि आपको अनुवाद की ज़रूरत है तो कृपया इस नंबर पर फोन करें: 01932 723553

Jeżeli chcemy, aby te informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić 01932 723553

Ashford Hospital
London Road
Ashford, Middlesex
TW15 3AA
Tel: **01784 884488**

St. Peter's Hospital
Guildford Road
Chertsey, Surrey
KT16 0PZ.
Tel: **01932 872000**

Website: www.ashfordstpeters.nhs.uk

Breathlessness

General Medicine

Breathlessness

Advice for those who are breathless

Introduction

Being short of breath can be very frightening and it can be difficult to know what to do.

Most importantly, do not panic!

Remember, your breathlessness will settle.

Here are a few techniques and ideas to help you control your breathing:

Breathing Techniques

There are various techniques for coping with breathlessness. Practice these every day when sitting down. As you become more familiar with them, use them to help when you are active and getting breathless. They will also help you manage if you suddenly get short of breath.

- All of these should be **gentle** and unforced
- **Never** hold your breath
- Use them in the positions described in the next section

Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty. If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01932 723553 or email pals@asph.nhs.uk. If you still remain concerned please contact our Complaints Manager on 01932 722612 or email complaints@asph.nhs.uk

Author: Lesley Spencer / Louisa Dennis **Department:** General Medicine

Version: 3

Published: March 2010

Review: March 2013

Remember the breathlessness will pass and your breathing will settle

If you have any queries or would like further advice please contact any of the below:

Your Physiotherapist:

Contact number:

Your nurse:

Contact number:

Breathing Control

This is helpful if you are generally short of breath. Breathing control means breathing gently, using the least amount of effort. Try to relax your shoulders, unclench your fists and clear your mind.

In a comfortable, supported position, relax your shoulders, arms and hands. Breathe in gently through your nose and breathe out through your nose or mouth. Try to feel more relaxed and calmer each time you breathe out.

Relaxed Deep Breathing

When doing an activity like walking, gently slow down your breathing and breathe more deeply - in through your nose and out through your mouth.

When breathing out try not to force the air out. Place your hands on your tummy, feeling with your hands as you breathe in and out.



BREATHING OUT (EXHALING) WITH THE DIAPHRAGM



BREATHING IN (INHALING) WITH THE DIAPHRAGM

This can be used at rest or on exertion and can be combined with pursed lips breathing.

Pursed Lips Breathing

Breathe out, with your lips pursed, as if you are whistling. This slows your breathing down and helps to make it more efficient.

- A fan blowing on the side of your face may be of help. Handheld, battery operated fans can be purchased from many shops.
- Specific acupuncture points can be useful to manage breathlessness; ask your Physiotherapist about these.
- Ask to be referred to the Occupational Therapy team. They may be able to provide certain equipment (long handled 'grabbers', bed risers or grab rails) to help you around the house and reduce the amount of stress that you exert.
- Imagery may help - imagine a place you like, focus on the smells, the colours, the sounds you associate with this place and try and absorb yourself in these. Finding things that help distract you from your feeling of breathlessness like, for instance, music, may also help.
- Being constipated and straining to go to the toilet may worsen your breathlessness. Eating a diet high in fibre (fruit, vegetables and wholemeal bread) and drinking plenty of fluids, ideally water will help. Ask a dietician, nurse or GP for practical advice and/or laxatives.
- There are medical interventions that can also be of help in addition to the things discussed in this leaflet. Please contact your GP, Consultant, Physiotherapist, or Nurse for further advice.

Other useful tips and tricks

- Make sure you take your medicines and use your inhalers as prescribed. If you feel wheezy or tight-chested, try using your 'reliever' inhaler. If you are not sure which one this is ask your respiratory nurse or physiotherapist.
- If possible, avoid things that make your breathing worse, e.g. smoke, strong smells, animals, sprays, cold, damp, stress or strenuous activities.
- Use your inhaler before doing anything or going anywhere that you know makes you wheezy or tight-chested.
- If you are breathless when eating, try soft food that does not take a lot of chewing. Use sauces and gravies. Eat little and often rather than having large meals. A dietician would be able to offer practical advice – ask to be referred. A good rule of thumb is to do activity little and often; be it the housework or eating.
- If you have phlegm make sure you clear it effectively. Discuss with your physiotherapist if you haven't been shown how and would like to know more. If your phlegm becomes discoloured or changes in any way from your norm ask to see your GP.



Using this, combined with the other techniques, may help you.

'Blow as you go!'

Breathe out when you are making a big effort, for example:-

- stretching your arms above your head
- reaching for something on a shelf
- bending down
- going up a step or stair
- standing up
- or during the hardest part of any action

BLOW as you GO!

Paced Breathing

This is useful when climbing the stairs (or walking). Breathe in, in time with the steps you take. Do this in a rhythm that suits you and dependant on how breathless you are.

For example:-

- Breathe in when on the stair, and breathe out as you go up a stair (blow as you go!), 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

Whilst you are not short of breath practice all of these exercises regularly and then, when you are breathless, you can choose which feels most comfortable at that time.

Positions to ease breathlessness

The best positions are those which need the least energy or effort. If you tense your shoulders and grip on to things when you are breathless, you are wasting energy (and oxygen).

Sitting

Sitting uses less energy than standing up. Try the following two positions and see which feels better for you:-

1. Lean forward, rest your forearms on your knees, or on the arms of the chair or a table. Try to let go of any tension in your arms and shoulders.

Alternatively, you may find this more comfortable:-

2. Sitting upright, rest against the chair back. Support your arms on the chair arms. Try to let go of any tension in your arms and shoulders. If you are really breathless, put pillows under your armpits to help keep your body stretched upright as much as possible.

When you are really short of breath:-

3. Rest your head and arms on pillows on a table or lie on your side, propped up with lots of pillows.

Standing

Lean forward from the hips, with your forearms resting on something at the right height (window sills, garden walls or kitchen work surfaces are usually of a suitable height).

Standing or Walking

Put your hands on your hips, in your pockets, or stick your thumbs into your belt loops to support your arms without gripping. If you carry a shoulder bag, rest your arms on it.

Using a walking aid (a walking stick, or a frame with wheels at the front) can help you find one of these comfortable postures when you are out and about. Most people feel better pushing a supermarket trolley - it works the same way.

Try all these positions and decide which ones are best for you. Different ones will suit different people and situations.

There are many support groups available; ask you Doctor, Physiotherapist or Nurse which ones would be most suitable for you.