



A lifetime of specialist care

Royal Brompton & Harefield **NHS**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Toolkit for managing breathlessness





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*This leaflet explains some techniques to help with breathlessness. The techniques do not replace your usual medication or personal advice from a healthcare professional. If your breathing is getting worse, or you are experiencing breathlessness for the first time, it is important to get advice from your GP.*

## What is breathing?

Breathing draws air in and out of our lungs, using our chest, neck and shoulder muscles.

Normally, we breathe 12 to 20 times a minute. The number of times you breathe each minute is called your breathing rate.

Some health conditions can change your breathing and make you more breathless.

## How to help reduce breathlessness

Breathlessness can be uncomfortable and distressing, but there are techniques you can use to make your breathing easier.

These techniques can help you control your breathing and reduce the sensation of breathlessness. Please adapt the techniques so they are comfortable for you.

## Abdominal breathing (diaphragmatic breathing)

Abdominal breathing draws air into the base of your lungs, using the main muscle for breathing – the diaphragm. The diaphragm is a large flat muscle at the base of your ribcage.

Abdominal breathing helps reduce the sensation of breathlessness, and helps get more air into your lungs.

Abdominal breathing is also called diaphragmatic breathing.

### How to do abdominal breathing

1. Wear comfortable clothes. Lie or sit in a comfortable position, and relax your neck and shoulders. Become aware of your breathing: its speed, rhythm and depth.
2. Put one hand on top of your chest and one hand on your abdomen (tummy). Breathe in and out slowly.
3. When you breathe in, try to take in a bit more air than usual. Feel your abdomen move out. Pause for a few moments, and then breathe out slowly.
4. As you breathe out, feel your abdomen move in. Try to breathe out a little longer than you breathed in.
5. Repeat as many times as is comfortable for you. Feel your abdomen move in and out with each breath.



Abdominal breathing can be used at any time. With practice, abdominal breathing will become more natural, and help you feel less breathless.

## Pursed lip breathing

Pursed lip breathing is a simple and safe way to get more air into your lungs. Pursed lip breathing keeps your airway open longer, so more air moves in and out.

### How to do pursed lip breathing

1. Breathe in through your nose, and slowly count to three, or for as long as is comfortable.
2. Purse your lips, as if you are going to whistle. Breathe out slowly, counting to four, or for as long as is comfortable. Breathe out for longer than you breathed in.
3. When you feel your lungs are emptied, breathe in slowly through your nose again.
4. Repeat, as many times as is comfortable for you.
5. Practise pursed lip breathing four to five times a day, so it becomes easier when you are breathless.

You can use pursed lip breathing whenever you are breathless, for example when you are lifting, walking or climbing stairs.



## Positions to help breathlessness

When you feel breathless, find a position that helps you relax. Talk to your nurse or physiotherapist about positions to help you.

### Sitting, leaning forwards >

Sit down and lean forwards, with your arms resting on your legs. Relax your arms and hands.



### < Sitting at a table

Sit down and lean forwards, with your arms resting on a table. You can put a pillow or cushion on the table, to rest your head on.



### Sitting upright >

Sit up straight against the back of a chair. Rest your arms on your legs, or on the chair arms. Relax your arms and hands.

## High side lying >

Lie on your side, with two or three pillows under your head and shoulders, for support. Bend both legs, or just your top leg, depending on what is comfortable for you.



## < Standing, leaning forwards

Find something to lean on for support. For example, you could lean on a chair, wall, rail or window sill. You could also lean on a walking stick, a walking frame or a long umbrella. Lean forwards and rest your arms on the chair, or other object you have to lean on.

## Standing, leaning backwards or sideways >

Stand about 30cms away from a wall, with your feet slightly apart. Lean backwards or sideways against the wall, and let your arms hang loosely. Rest your hands by your side, or rest them in your pockets, or on a belt or waistband.



## Progressive muscle relaxation

This technique tenses and relaxes the muscles in your body. You gradually relax each muscle, tensing for about five seconds, and relaxing for about eight seconds, or whatever is comfortable for you.

### How to do progressive muscle relaxation

1. Find a comfortable position, lying down or sitting in a supportive chair.
2. Clench your hands and hold for five seconds. Now open out your hands and relax, for eight seconds. Repeat two times.
3. Lift your hands up to your shoulders. Tense your arms, and hold for five seconds. Now rest your hands by your side, and relax your arms, for eight seconds. Repeat two times.
4. Bring your shoulders up towards your ears, hold for five seconds, then relax for eight seconds (see photos).
5. Now push your shoulders backwards, hold for five seconds, then relax for eight seconds. Repeat two times.
6. Turn your head to the right, as far as is comfortable. Hold for five seconds. Then turn





your head to the centre position, and relax for eight seconds. Turn your head to the left, and hold for five seconds. Then turn your head back to the centre position, and relax for eight seconds. Now push your chin into your chest, and hold for five seconds. Lift your head into your normal position, and let your neck muscles relax. Repeat two times.

7. Open your eyes wide and raise your eyebrows as far as possible, hold for five seconds, then relax for eight seconds. Now shut your eyes tight, and hold for five seconds. Then open your eyes, and relax for eight seconds. Repeat two times.
8. Take a deep breath in and hold as long as is comfortable. Breathe out and relax. Repeat two times. Let your breathing become calm and regular.
9. Straighten your legs and push your toes and feet down. Hold for five seconds, or as long as is comfortable, then relax for eight seconds. Now pull your toes up towards your knees. Hold for five seconds, then relax for eight seconds. Repeat two times.
10. Now let your whole body relax. Close your eyes and breathe steadily. Spend a few minutes in this relaxed state. Then open your eyes, and stretch your arms and legs.

## Hand-held fans

A fan creates a cool draft of air. The cool air can help reduce the sensation of breathlessness.

Fans with three or more rotating blades are often best to relieve breathlessness.

Small fans can fit into your pocket or bag, so you have the fan to hand when you feel breathless.

### Using a hand-held fan

When you feel breathless, stop moving, and sit or lie down, if you can.

Hold your fan about 15cms (6") from your face, or whatever is comfortable for you. Aim the fan towards the middle of your face, so the air goes around your nose and top lip.

Your breathing should get easier in a few minutes. Using a fan is safe, so you can use your fan as often as you want.



## More tips to help breathing

- Open a window in your home or car to create a cool draft of air. You can also use a table fan or floor-standing fan.
- Put a cool flannel or compress on your face.
- Plan your daily activities in advance, and be realistic.
- Pace your activities, give yourself plenty of time, and avoid hurrying.

## More information

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the respiratory wards. Phone **020 7352 8121**, and ask for bleep **9002** or **1454** (Monday to Friday, 8am–3.30pm).

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If you have concerns about any aspect of the service you have received in hospital and feel unable to talk to those people responsible for your care, call the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on:

- Royal Brompton Hospital – 020 7349 7715
- Harefield Hospital – 01895 826 572

You can also email [pals@rbht.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@rbht.nhs.uk). This is a confidential service.

Royal Brompton Hospital  
Sydney Street  
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tel: 020 7352 8121  
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Website: [www.rbht.nhs.uk](http://www.rbht.nhs.uk)

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Brosurteki bilginin Türkçe tercumesi için tedavi görüyor olduğunuz bölüme bas vurunuz. Bölüm personeli tercumenin gerçekleşmesini en kısa zamanda ayaracaktır.

