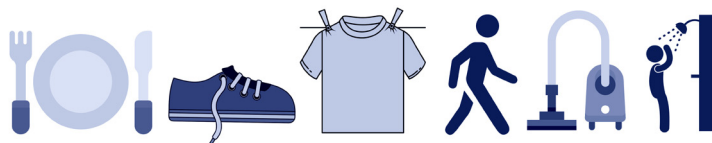


Breathlessness is a major symptom in COPD. It can often seem to come on for no apparent reason or with very little exertion. This can cause people to feel frightened, out of control and anxious.

Common activities that can cause breathlessness



Many activities can cause breathlessness such as, walking, bending down, showering, getting dressed, going to the toilet, vacuuming, hanging out washing, and lifting things.

Eating can be challenging as it can require effort to prepare food and then it is difficult to eat food due to breathlessness. Eating a large portion can also cause breathlessness.

Managing your breathlessness

These strategies can help manage chronic breathlessness in stable lung disease. If your breathlessness becomes out of control and unmanageable rapidly, please seek medical attention.

1. Conserve your energy and pace yourself

People who are breathless often rush to get tasks done. This is not a useful strategy. Learning to pace yourself helps keep control of your breathing so that you can manage independently for longer.

- **Plan your day:** Don't try to fit too much in- allow plenty of time to carry out tasks. Cut bigger tasks down into smaller manageable parts and allow for plenty of rest periods between each task.
- **Prioritise tasks:** Which tasks can wait until you feel less breathless?
- **Adapt tasks:** Can you sit down to complete the task? Is there a simpler way to complete the task?
- **Delegate:** Can someone help you with the task?

2. Use a fan



A fan can help control breathlessness. Hand-held fans are a great option because they are cheap, quiet and easily portable.

A free-standing fan, a desktop fan or the breeze through an open door or window can also help.

To use the fan: Hold the fan about 15 centimetres from your face so you can feel the air on your top lip. Slowly move the fan from side to side so that the breeze covers the bottom half of your face.

3. Find a resting position

Find your resting position - this is a position which helps you relax and breathe better. You may already unconsciously use these.



- Lean forward with arms resting on your knees or the sides of a chair and position knees slightly apart.



- Lean forward over a table or surface resting on your arms up on some pillows or similar.



- Lean forward with arms resting on a surface e.g. supermarket trolley, or back of a chair. Alternatively, rest standing with your back against a wall.

4. Breathing control techniques

There are several different breathing techniques that can be used to manage breathlessness.

Breathing control

1. Place one hand on your tummy.
2. Relax upper chest and shoulders.
3. Breathe in gently through your nose (feel your tummy move out).
4. Breathe out through your nose and/or mouth and your tummy will move in.

Pursed lips

This can be used with all activities and at rest.

1. Breathe in gently through your nose.
2. Breathe out with your lips pursed as if you are whistling or blowing through a straw

Blow as you go

Use this when doing something that makes you breathless, such as hanging out washing.

1. Breathe in before you make the effort.
2. Breathe out while making the effort.

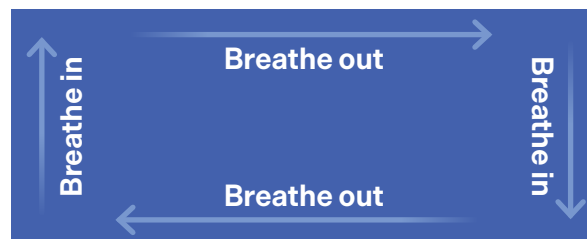
Paced breathing

Useful when you're active (climbing stairs or walking).

1. Pace your steps to your breathing.
2. Breathe in.
3. Breathe out as you go up a stair.

Breathe around the rectangle

1. Focus on a rectangle shape e.g. door frame or window
2. Breathe in along the short side
3. Breathe out along the long side



5. Distraction and relaxation

Focus on things that bring you pleasure or calmness. Mindfulness and meditation can be useful.

6. Exercise

Regular activity is important to maintain fitness and strength, but should be done in moderation.

Ask to be referred to your local pulmonary rehabilitation programme.

7. Medication

Use your prescribed medication as directed. If you have difficulty managing your breathlessness, talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner as there may be other medications that may help.

When feeling breathless...



Stop what you're doing



Find a resting position



Use your fan or the breeze



Choose your preferred breathing technique, and continue for 2-3 minutes

After 2-3 minutes evaluate your breathlessness

Are you feeling less breathless and more in control?

Yes → Continue with your activity **OR** **No** → Take reliever medication through a spacer, then resume breathing technique for another 2-3 minutes.

If you still feel no better, then assess whether you need to seek medical help.