

Coping with breathlessness

Tools to promote good breathing

*because
you matter*

**St Nicholas
Hospice Care**

A Registered Charity No. 287773

**For an alternative format or
language, please contact;
enquiries@stnh.org.uk**

This leaflet provides information for those experiencing breathlessness (sometimes called **dyspnoea**) as a result of situations such as illness, treatment regimes and/or anxiety.

For many people it is quite common to get short of breath. However, it can still be frightening, uncomfortable and feel difficult to manage for both the sufferer and their carers, friends and family.

This leaflet aims to give you some tools and simple methods to promote good breathing techniques and help alleviate episodes of breathlessness.



Breathe



Help and advice

Positioning

During an episode of breathlessness, the following positions can maximise the efficiency of the lungs

Sitting

Relaxed sitting

Sit back on a chair with your arms relaxed and hands resting comfortably on your thighs.



Sitting at a table

Place one or two pillows on a table, sit in a chair and lean forward at the hips, supporting your head and upper chest on a pillow.



Sitting leaning forward

Sit on a chair and lean forward with your arms resting on your thighs and your wrists relaxed.



Standing

Lean forward

With arms/hands resting on a static object at around waist or hip height such as a window sill, a chair or kitchen work top.



Lean backward

Relax your shoulders and lean back against a wall with your arms relaxed and resting by your sides.

Lying

Use pillows

Support yourself when lying on your back or side with pillows.



Hand held fan

The sensation of air from the fan (or an open window) around the nose and mouth can help reduce breathlessness.

Hold the fan fairly close to the face; about 15cm away. It is important to focus on your breath out, try to imagine you are blowing out a candle. You can use the fan for as long as you need. It may take a couple of minutes before you feel a difference.



Breathing rectangle

Use the breathing rectangle below to try and help you regain control of your breathing. Imagine a rectangle or 'breathe around' anything rectangular in your home such as pictures, plug sockets, windows or rugs.

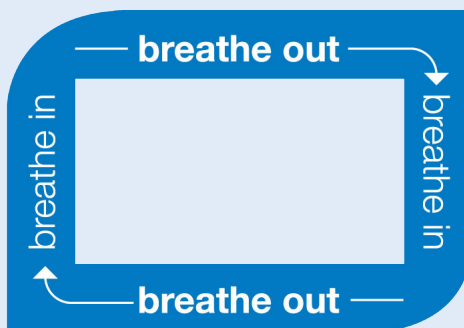
Technique

Starting at the top left corner, breathe out as you look along the top line, pause, then breathe in as you follow the line down. Pause, and then repeat as you go around the rectangle.

Ask the **Independent Living Team** if you need advice on how to use the breathing rectangle effectively.



*Breathing
rectangle*



Breathing control

This is a method of relieving breathlessness through practising a more normal and efficient breathing pattern. Practice for short periods of time using your own breathing rate. As you gain control try to slow the breathing rate down.

Technique

Follow the four points below if you are feeling anxious and to help manage everyday activities such as dressing, climbing stairs or bathing.

1. Settle in a relaxed position with your back well supported.
2. Keeping chest and shoulders relaxed, place your hand on your lower rib/upper abdomen.
3. Breathe in gently through your nose feeling the lower chest expand.
4. Breathe out through your mouth.

The Independent Living Team can show you how to do this if you need assistance.

The five P's rule

Planning, prioritisation, pacing, positioning and permission

Plan ahead. Think through your daily activities. Plan what you need to do and when, giving yourself plenty of time to achieve each task.

Prioritise. Accept help when it's offered. Conserve your energy for specific activities that you enjoy. Don't waste energy on chores/tasks that others can do for you.

Pace yourself. Intersperse periods of activity with periods of rest.

Positioning. Different positions can save you energy and reduce breathlessness. Could you do your activities in an easier way? For example, sitting down to chop vegetables.

Permission. Give yourself permission to do things differently and to say no. It is ok to ask for help and rest when needed.

Acupressure/acupuncture

You may be offered acupuncture by your physiotherapist but acupressure can be self-administered or given by a carer. It works on the same principal of alleviating ailments using pressure points but hands and fingers are used in place of acupuncture needles.

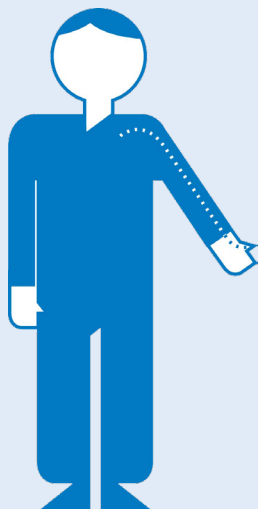
There are several points that can be used in the treatment of breathlessness. These will be taught to you by a member of staff.

Doing it yourself

Gently stroking down the **lung meridian** (as illustrated below) on either side of the body can be very useful in an episode of acute breathlessness. Always start at the shoulder end coming off the thumb.

Also, gentle stroking across the upper back can help reduce anxiety and breathlessness.

The Independent Living Team can show you how to do this if you need assistance



The lung meridian

Adjustments at home

Nutrition and hydration

It is important to maintain good nutrition to maintain energy levels and hydration to keep any secretions such as mucus loose and easier to remove from the lungs.

Aids and adaptations

Breathlessness can be made worse by many simple activities around the house. This can be relieved by using appropriate aids and appliances such as bath aids, perching stools, walking aids and a 'helping hand' tool to avoid bending.

Relaxation

It can be beneficial to find a relaxation technique that works for you. This could include a number of things that, when combined with breathing control, will help you to feel less anxious and more in control. Here are a few suggestions that you might consider trying:

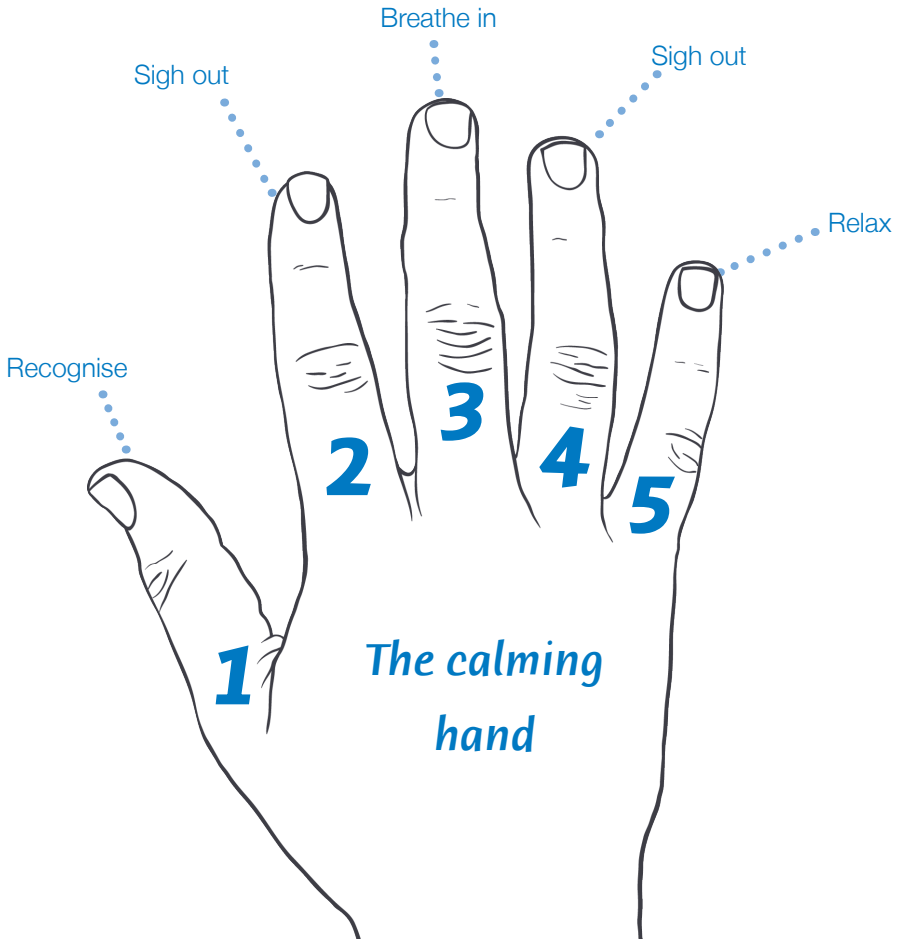
- A relaxation tape, YouTube, CD or MP3 which combines voiceover and music to help focus your relaxation
- Listen to music which you find relaxing. Some people prefer classical music whereas others might choose folk. Put your favourite 'chill out' tunes on and relax
- Concentrate on a favourite object such as a painting, photo or piece of art
- Imagine you are in your favourite place

Imagine your favourite place



Use your hands

If in doubt, use the calming hand image below and refer to it whenever you feel breathless.



This leaflet is intended to be used as a guide alongside advice given to you by your GP, Hospice doctors, nurses and physiotherapists. If you have any doubts or queries please speak to one of our clinicians. Further advice and information is also available from the team at St Nicholas Hospice Care.

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