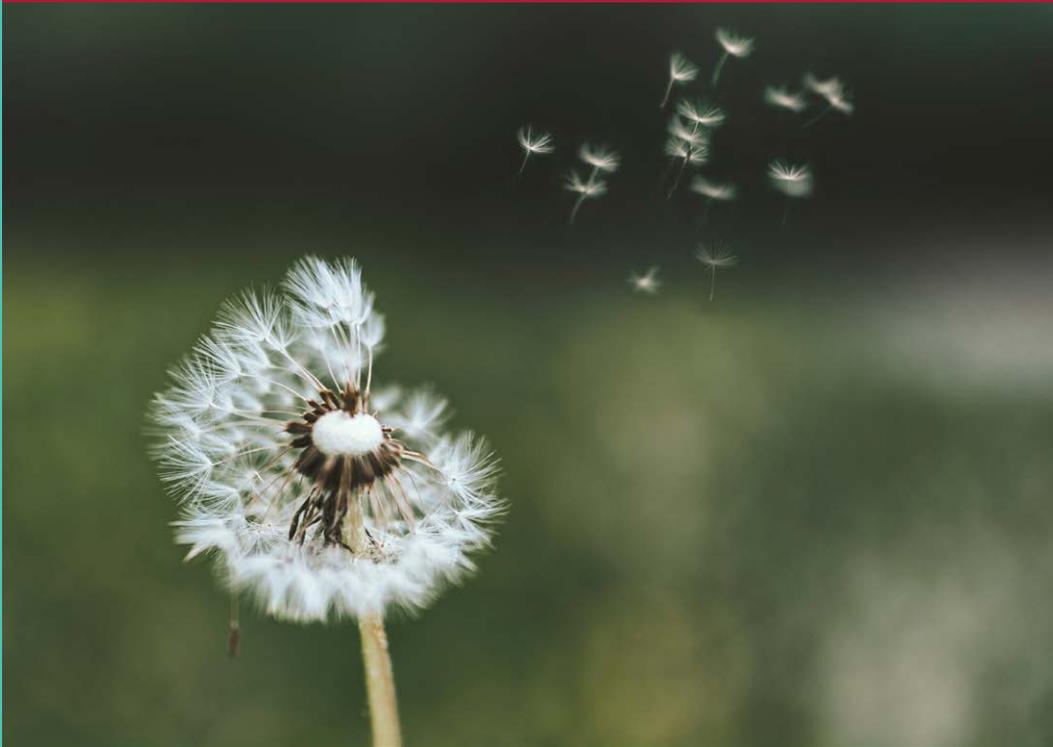


The Myton Hospices

Fatigue and Breathlessness



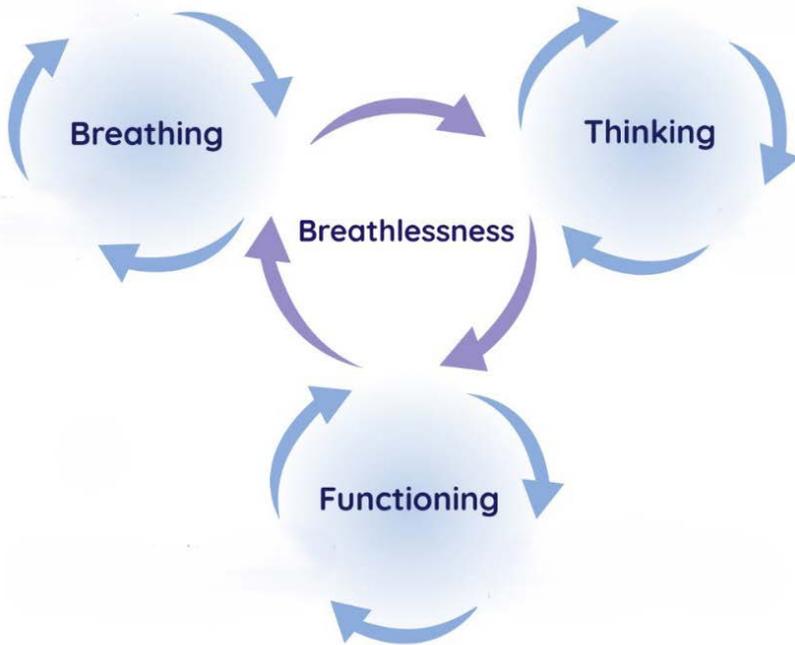
Living with a condition that causes breathlessness can be distressing.

The aim of this leaflet is to give you some advice and practical techniques to help you manage your breathlessness and fatigue.

Understanding Breathlessness

Many conditions cause symptoms of breathlessness. Evidence suggests that how breathless you feel does not always match up with how well you are getting air into your lungs.

How we think, how we move and function, and how we breathe can all have a positive (or negative) impact on how breathless we feel.

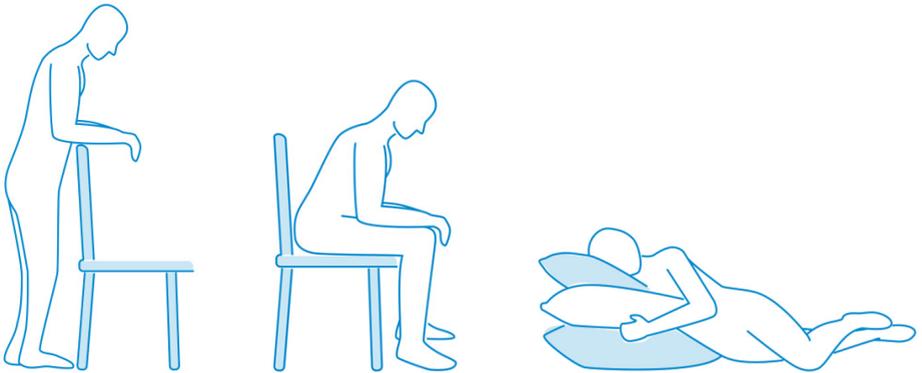


*Reproduced with permission of the Cambridge
Breathlessness Intervention Service.*

Helpful Tips and Techniques

Practice the following techniques when you are at your least breathless so that they gradually become more automatic. Practising techniques regularly will make them easier to do when you are feeling breathless.

Here are some examples of ways to control your breathing



Positioning

Finding a comfortable position can ease breathlessness. A forward position leaning on your arms, can be helpful as this helps the muscles involved in breathing to work better.

It is very important to 'flop' and drop your shoulders to reduce tension in your shoulders and your body

Relaxed Breathing / Diaphragmatic breathing

You can change the way you breathe to make it more relaxed and efficient.

- Find your comfortable position, breathe gently and try to soften and drop your shoulders with each breath.
- Rest a hand on your tummy and breathe in gently to feel your tummy rise. Then breathe out slowly through your nose or your mouth and feel your tummy fall. Rest and wait for the next breath to come.



Stomach pushes out

Stomach pulls in

When you are comfortable with the 'relaxed breathing', try to slow down the speed of your breathing. When you slow down, your breathing becomes deeper and more efficient. Imagine air filling your tummy like a balloon.

Pursed lip breathing

You may find it helpful to purse your lips while you breathe out slowly as though you were making a candle flicker.



Sourced from [healthline.com](https://www.healthline.com)

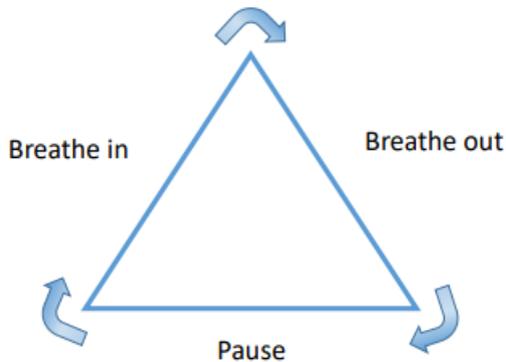
Shaped Breathing

Rectangular breathing



- Find something rectangular to look at such as a window, door or the TV.
- Let your eyes follow the edges of the rectangle, breathing in on the short sides and out on the long sides. Focus on the longer outward breath.
- Gradually slow down your breathing as you feel able, until you feel calmer and your breathing is more under control.

Triangular breathing



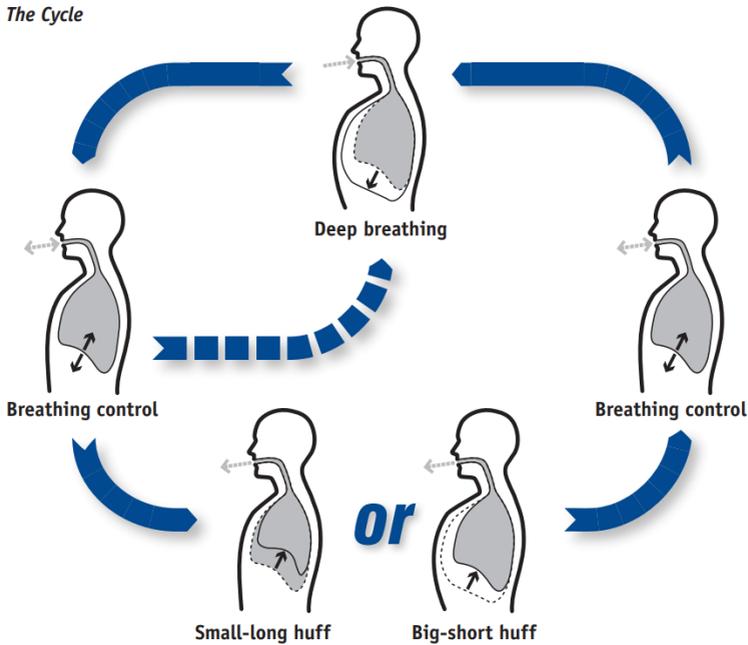
- This may be more helpful for someone with restrictive lung disease or when a longer breath out is uncomfortable
- Make a triangular shape with your thumbs and index fingers and focus on them as you "breathe in, breathe out and relax, take a natural pause".

Using a hand-held fan

Cooling the face, especially around the mouth and nose, can help reduce how breathless you feel.

- Try wiping a cool wet flannel on your nose and upper cheeks of your face.
- Holding a hand held fan approximately 15cm from your face and directing the flow towards the central part of your face can help reduce feelings of breathlessness.

Active Cycle of Breathing Techniques (ACBT)



Reproduced from a leaflet on ACBT from the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care www.acprc.org.uk

People with lung conditions sometimes cough and produce more phlegm than usual.

It is important to remove phlegm from the lungs to help you to breathe more easily and help to reduce infections.

ACBT is one way to help clear sputum from your airways. Please discuss this in more detail if you need to with a physiotherapist.

Be more Physically Active

Keeping active is proven to optimise or improve your strength and stamina. It is ok to feel moderately breathless during activity and the techniques and tips given to you in this booklet will support you to manage your breathlessness.

During the Fatigue and Breathlessness session the physiotherapist will advise on how to gradually change your current activity levels and recommend appropriate exercises.

Please remember that it is okay to ask for help. Please continue to contact your health and social care teams if you need further support.

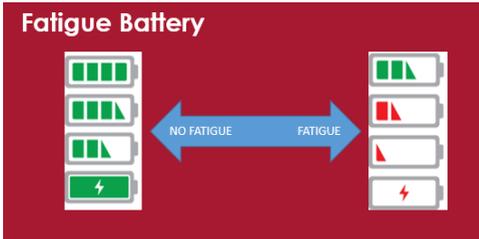


Additional advice

- Avoid breath holding in activities, such as climbing the stairs or bending.
- **'Blow as you go'** ie breath out on effort. For example blow out when bending, lifting, reaching or standing up from a chair.
- Consider a walking stick or rollator to help stabilise your shoulders when walking.
- You may wish to consider an 'Action Plan for Recovery' to identify which techniques work to help you manage your breathlessness. Please discuss this with the physiotherapist if you need to.

Fatigue

Most people who experience chronic breathlessness often experience fatigue.



What is Fatigue?

Fatigue can be described as an extreme, persistent tiredness that can impact on everyday activities. It can feel overwhelming and is often not improved by rest.

How can Fatigue affect you?

Fatigue may impact on you physically, as well as cognitively, behaviourally and emotionally.

Some common symptoms are:

- Being unable to summon the energy to do even small daily tasks
- Avoiding socialising because it is too much effort
- Having trouble remembering things and difficulty making decisions
- Feeling impatient with others, affecting your relationships with family and friends

What causes fatigue?

Fatigue can have many causes, including disease progression, anaemia, pain, anxiety and depression. It can also be caused by some medications and side effects of treatment.

What can you do to help manage it?

Be realistic, know your limitations and recognise your triggers. Think of your energy like a battery and give it a chance to 're-charge.' This can be done by balancing periods of physical activity, rest and relaxation. You can also use energy conservation techniques

Energy Conservation

Energy conservation means finding the easiest way of doing a task, while using the least amount of energy.

Energy conservation can be broken down into five main areas:

Prioritise

When you have a limited amount of energy available to you, make sure you use it on the activities that are the most important to you.



Plan

Try and spread tasks throughout the week, rather than fitting them all into one day. Plan rest and relaxation times to prevent yourself becoming over-fatigued. Plan individual activities so they can be completed in the most energy efficient way, including social activities (eg meeting a friend).

Pace

Slow your overall speed when completing a task, and break it down into manageable chunks which can be completed at different times. Be aware of your limitations. Stop and rest before you become overtired.

Posture

Reduce unnecessary bending and reaching. Sit where possible to complete a task.

Permission

Consider whether you feel able to accept help with some activities.

General Energy Conservation Tips

- Try to avoid all or nothing patterns, spread tasks over the week, avoiding very busy days
- Sit rather than stand where possible as standing uses 25% more energy
- Try only to mobilise up and down the stairs when necessary
- Use an across body bag to carry objects so you can use both hands on your mobility aids or stairs if needed
- Reduce reaching and bending by storing frequently used items between hip and shoulder height, ideally on the work surface if in the kitchen
- A long handled reacher (helping hand) can also reduce bending and reaching - it can be used for many tasks from picking lightweight items up off the floor, to pulling a curtain across the window
- As showering and bathing can make you feel quite tired, try having your shower or bath the night before if you have a busy day ahead of you
- After showering or bathing use a towelling dressing gown to dry off instead of having to rub yourself dry with a towel
- Dress your lower body first if possible as this uses more energy
- Select foods requiring minimum preparation, e.g ready meals, pre prepared vegetables
- When going out to a social event, consider having a quiet day before and plan a quiet day after
- When socialising at home consider limiting the amount of visitors and the duration they stay so you do not become too fatigued and are able to enjoy their company

Physical Activity

Physical activity is important as it helps your body to be as fit as it can be, and work in the most efficient way.

Physical activity can help to improve your mood and feelings of well-being. This can also help reduce your fatigue levels.

Relaxation

Relaxation can help with tension and anxiety. If you are tense and anxious your body will use more energy.

Relaxation changes the physiological response in our bodies. It activates the parasympathetic nervous system which supports our immune system, enables us to digest food, and conserves energy supplies.

Relaxation can take a number of forms and will be personal to you.



Effective fatigue management is a balance between energy conservation, physical activity and relaxation.

During a consultation with our Occupational Therapist they will be able to advise you on techniques, tips and adapted equipment that may help conserve your energy during everyday activities.

Acknowledgements

Information adapted from Cambridge Breathlessness Intervention Service with kind permission.

Pictures courtesy of The British Lung Foundation www.blf.org.uk.
Managing breathlessness at home during the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak: NIHR Applied Research Collaborative Palliative and End of Life Care Theme. April 3rd 2020.

Useful links and resources

Managing Breathlessness:

<https://www.stchristophers.org.uk/video-breathlessness-breathing/>
<https://www.stchristophers.org.uk/video-breathlessness-functioning/>
<https://www.stchristophers.org.uk/video-breathlessness-thinking/>
<https://www.stchristophers.org.uk/video-breathlessness-attacks/>

Using the handheld fan:

<https://vimeo.com/75201124>

Relaxation:

https://soundcloud.com/cuh_nhs/body-relaxation-scripts
https://soundcloud.com/cuh_nhs/letting-go-relaxation-scripts

Adapted Seated Tai Chi:

Demonstration Version: www.mytonhospice.org/tai1
Full 18 Movements: www.mytonhospice.org/tai2

Seated Exercises from British Lung Foundation:

<https://vimeo.com/413976957>

Falls Prevention:

<https://youtu.be/SP6lbf9L9Mo>
<https://youtu.be/oq-ph9beUDo>

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