

## Living Well – Breathing

Breathlessness is not harmful, but it is very unpleasant and frightening. It is important for you to remain as active as your illness allows you to be, even though you may be feeling breathless.

Breathlessness can make you feel anxious, which in turn makes your breathlessness worse. However, the way your brain senses breathlessness can be changed so that you don't get as anxious.

There are lots of different exercises you can do, or positions you can get into which will help your breathing.

### TOOLKIT

1. Breathing control
2. Positions to breathe
3. Recovery breathing
4. Pursed lip breathing
5. Candle breathing
6. Rectangle breathing
7. Hand held fan
8. Calming hand
9. Positions to rest
10. How can my relative or carer help?

### TOOLKIT : Breathing

#### 1. Breathing Control: When you have mild breathlessness

This type of breathing exercises helps your body to breathe in the most efficient way. This is how the body is designed to breathe. It helps to avoid any unnecessary effort and can calm your breathing.

## Breathing control – IF IN DOUBT, BREATHE OUT

### Preparation

- Place both hands on your tummy, just above your belly button.
- Relax your shoulders and arms.
- Let your elbows rest in by your sides.

### Spend as long as you need on each of the following points:

- Feel the breathing movement under your hands.
  - As you **breathe in**, allow your tummy to **swell** (fill the balloon)
  - As you **breathe out**, relax and let your tummy **fall** (let the balloon shrink)
  - Focus on where the breathing is happening – a feeling of breathing around the waist
- **Relax** and **release** each out breath until it comes to its natural end.
- As you breathe out, **relax** your upper chest a little more.
- **Allow** the air in, breathing **smoothly** and **quietly**; take in only the air you need.
- **If possible**, breathe **in** through your nose and **out** through your mouth.  
Narrow your mouth slightly, if it helps.
- **Pause** as comfortable after each breath out.
- Stay still for a minute after you have got your breath back before moving.

## 2. Positions to breathe: when you are severely or overwhelmingly breathless



### **3. Recovery Breathing Method**

- Stop.
- Take up a breathing recovery position.
- Turn on the hand held fan and aim at your nose and mouth.
- Blow out onto the fan, but don't force the air.
- Don't worry about the in breath; it will take care of its self.
- As you breathe out narrow your mouth slightly, if it helps.
- When you feel ready, blow out for longer.
- Once your breathing has eased, come up straight.
- Relax your shoulders and upper chest.
- Bring your breathing back to your tummy.
- Stay still for a minute after you have got your breath back before moving.

### **4. Pursed Lip Breathing**

When using the above techniques of breathing control and recovery breathing some people find narrowing their mouth slightly makes their breathing feel easier. Breathing out through a narrowed mouth like this is called pursed lips breathing. It helps by creating a backpressure that supports your airways. When practicing pursed lips breathing gradually narrow your mouth until you feel your breathing becomes a little easier. "Pursed lips" breathing does not help everybody. Ask your physiotherapist or healthcare practitioner for advice.

### **5. Candle Breathing:**

As you breathe out, imagine you are making a candle flame flicker; feel your shoulders and upper chest relax. Try making the breath out twice as long as the breath in. Sigh out, pause then allow the air in.

## 6. Rectangle Breathing:

Focus on a rectangular shape, perhaps the television, or a window or picture on the wall and breathe out as you scan the long side, pause, then allow the air in as you move your gaze along the short side



## 7. Hand Held Fan

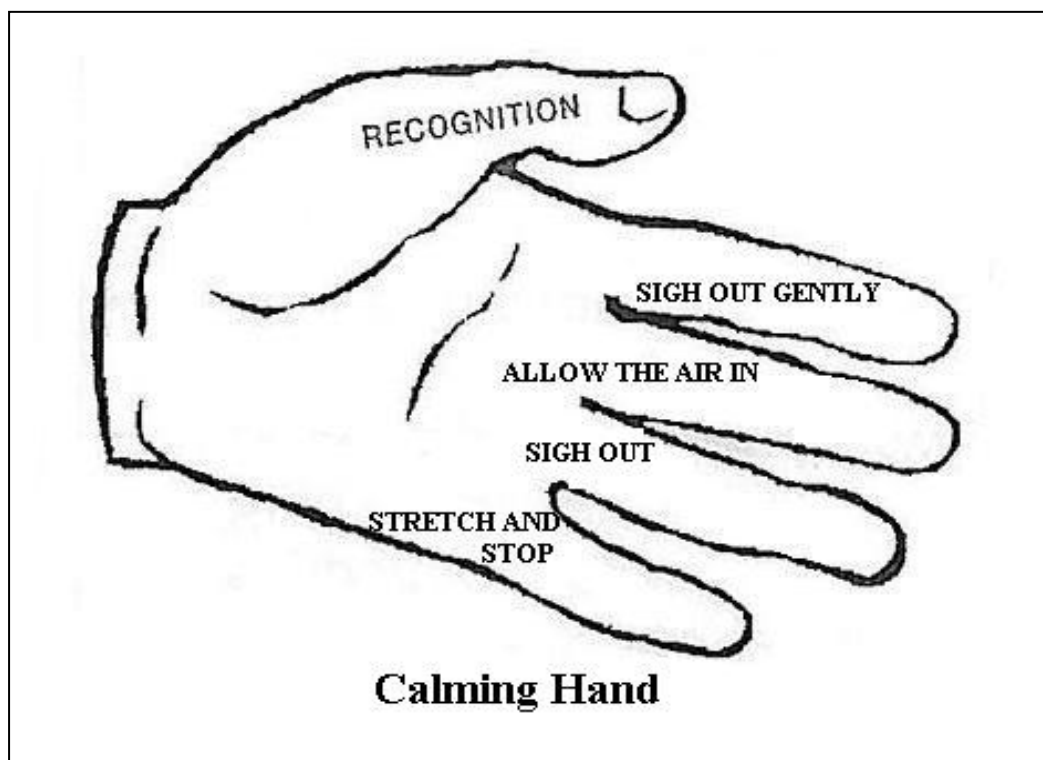
### Will using a fan help my breathlessness?

- A cool draft of air from a handheld fan has been found to be very helpful in reducing the feeling of breathlessness.
- You may also find that the following can also help ease breathlessness:
  - desktop or floor standing fans
  - opening windows, for example in the car, to allow a cool draft of air to enter
  - Some people like to use a cool flannel or compress on their face.

### How should I use the handheld fan?

- Fans with three or more rotating blades seem to be most effective.
- When you feel breathless adopt a comfortable position. You can discuss this with your physiotherapist or doctor for further advice.
- Hold your fan approximately six inches or 15cms from your face (or the distance you find most helpful).
- Aim the draft of air towards the central part of your face so that you feel the draught around the sides of your nose and above your top lip.
- You should feel the benefit within a few minutes.

## 8. Calming Hand:

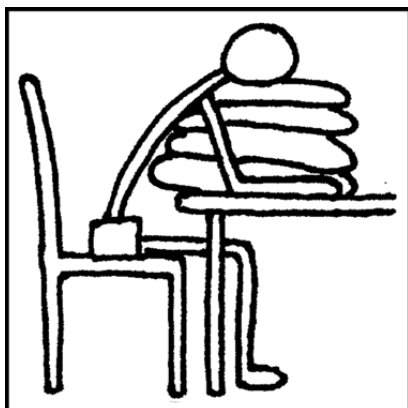


Place your left hand in your lap or on the arm of a chair. Make sure the palm is uppermost. Always start with the thumb. As you grasp each finger in turn, follow the instructions below:

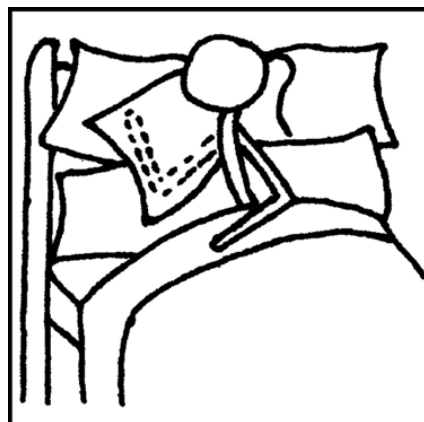
THUMB	Recognise the signs of panic and need to use the hand
FIRST FINGER	Sigh out gently – this will help relax your neck and shoulder muscles
SECOND FINGER	Allow the air in, breathing around the waist
RING FINGER	Breathe out slowly – try to make the breath out slightly longer than the breath in
LITTLE FINGER	Stretch out your fingers, until you feel the tension build in the arms, then STOP, let the hands drop, feel the tension go and your shoulders relax. Sometimes just hand-stretching is enough to stop a panic developing

## 9. Resting Positions

The following positions may help if you are breathless at rest or if you are feeling very tired or exhausted from breathlessness.



Relax down onto the pillows as much as possible. Having your legs apart may also help.



Make sure you are fully over on your side. Resting your upper arm on a pillow may also help.

## 10. Ask your relative or carer to help:

If you have someone with you when you are feeling breathless, they can help you by supporting you as you work through the techniques that you find helpful.

Ask your partner to rub the area of your back between the shoulder blades in a circular motion – this helps to stimulate acupressure points and will relieve feelings of breathlessness. Or, your partner can sit next to you and slowly slide their hand down one of your arms, from the shoulder to the wrist; try to gently exhale each time they slide their hand down your arm.