

## Patient information

### Pulmonary Rehabilitation - Coping with Breathlessness

Therapies Department - Aintree Hospital

#### Living with breathlessness

**Our role is to assist patients in maintaining independent living skills by helping to solve problems, by teaching new techniques, and/or, by providing adaptive equipment.**

**This section contains advice to help you manage your shortness of breath, and in so doing, minimising its effect on your life, allowing you the control to do the things you want to.**

#### General energy conservation tips

- Adopt a co-operative work sharing attitude within your family.
- Work to your own speed, do not rush.
- Organise your activities, do the tasks requiring the most exertion when you have the most energy.
- Interchange the easy with the difficult activities and take **rest periods** in between to prevent over fatigue.
- When possible sit down to work.
- Learn relaxation techniques.
- Use breathing control.

#### Bending

- Try to avoid bending over from the waist as this makes breathing difficult.
- Crouch keeping your back straight and bend from the knees.

This allows you to keep your chest upright and your shoulders back – a position from which you can continue to breathe as comfortably as possible.

As you crouch try to ensure that you have something secure to hold on to such as a table or sofa to provide you with extra support and this will also give you something to push against as you stand.

- When working at a level below your waist, e.g. emptying the washing machine or gardening, use a low stool and sit rather than bend.

## **Arranging things around the house**

- Put items that you use most frequently in easily accessible place.
- Un-clutter your storage areas so that you can easily find and reach what you need.

## **Showering and bathing**

- Avoid water being too hot and do not fill the bath too full.
- Keep shampoo and soap within easy reach.
- Use a bath board or shower stool if necessary.
- Install grab rails and use non-slip bath mats to help you keep your balance.
- Use a long handled scrub brush to wash your back.
- Sit to undress, bathe, dry and dress.
- Help, to dry yourself by wrapping yourself in a towelling robe.
- Avoid over exertion by taking rests.

## **Planning your activities**

- Try a daily and/or weekly schedule.
- Make a decision as to which jobs are absolutely necessary to make your home comfortable and attractive.
- Distribute tedious tasks throughout the week. Alternate heavy tasks with light ones.

## **Pacing your activities**

- Frequent short rests are more beneficial than fewer long rests.
- Can you break tasks into steps – can any of these steps be delegated?

## **Food preparation**

- Prepare food for two or more meals at one cooking session and refrigerate or freeze.
- Always have a store cupboard or items for when you may be too tired to prepare a meal e.g. thick nourishing soups.

## **Shopping**

- Use home delivery or delegate tasks or shop with a friend or family member.
- Take a list.
- Make full use of customer services available.

## **Talking on the telephone**

- Make sure that family and friends know that it can take you some time to answer the telephone. **Do not rush.**
- Sit down before you pick up the phone.
- Take a moment to catch your breath before you start the conversation.
- If you become breathless talk in short sentences.

## **Feeling tired**

- Rest throughout the day, but balance periods of rest with some gentle exercise as prolonged rest can result in a rapid drain of energy that can lead to feelings of overwhelming tiredness.

## **Positive ways of coping**

**Learn to relax** – Try the quick relaxation technique or listen to the relaxation tape.

## **Look after yourself physically**

### **Plan your day**

- Set priorities
- Tackle difficult jobs first
- Could anyone else help out?
- Do not set yourself impossible goals
- Be assertive – Learn to say **No**
- **Treat yourself - now and again**
- Share your problems – Don't be afraid to ask for help
- **Try not to worry too much over things of which you have no control**
- Try to develop an optimistic attitude to life

## **Minimising Worry**

### **What to do:**

**Talk it out** – Share it with someone else.

**Write it out** – It is easier to see it in perspective when it is put on paper.

**Shrug it off** – Try the quick relaxation technique!

**Breathe it away** – Inhale slowly and deeply and exhale fully a few times – calm your thoughts.

**Sort it out** – List practical options, weigh each one up, decide, and then act.

**Reverse it** – Consider taking an opposite approach, explore other alternatives.

**Cancel it** – Think positively, don't let the negative get you down.

**Hold it** – say STOP, pause, think. Now take a fresh look.

## **Breathing Control**

This can be used to ease your breathlessness i.e. following some exertion

However if your Breathlessness is Increasing and your symptoms continue to **worsen** despite your relievers then please **contact** your **GP/Hospital**

## **Breathing in COPD**

- People with COPD tend to breathe more using the upper part of their chest, with shoulders hunched forward often fixing their arms on their knees.
- This is inefficient and uses more energy than it gains.
- While adopting this position, the oxygen you breathe in is not being used effectively.

## **What Is Breathing Control?**

This is a more efficient way of breathing and can help you to relax and have a feeling of control.

When practicing breathing control make sure you are in a comfortable position. Closing your eyes may help you to relax. Think about relaxing your shoulders and breathing in and out through your nose.

Do not try to take deep breaths – just gentle breaths in and out. Think about slowing your breathing rate down.

## **Positions of Ease**

### **Position 1**

Find a wall or window ledge to lean on to. Rest your arms and let your head fall forwards.

### **Position 2**

Sitting leaning forwards, arms resting on your lap, or on a table will help.

### **Position 3**

Lean against a wall.

Let your head fall forwards and your arms hang loosely at your sides.

## Posture

- Posture can affect breathing. Sitting slumped in a chair or lying slumped in a bed hinders the working of the main muscle of breathing i.e. the diaphragm.
- The diaphragm is attached at the base of the ribs and a slumped posture stops it working correctly.
- Sitting with a small cushion in the hollow of the back and with the chest supported to the back, lifts the ribs up and out of the stomach. This allows a longer, lower breath to be taken.
- In standing or moving, stretching up a little taller allows the ribs to lift up.
- Pulling the shoulders blades together pushes the breast bone forward a little and also increases the capacity of the chest.
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## Warning Signs

If you have COPD you are more likely to get chest infections and exacerbations.

Exacerbations of COPD are when your usual symptoms become much worse, perhaps if you have a virus.

It is important that you call your doctor as soon as possible and receive the appropriate treatment.

The sooner you receive treatment the easier it will be for you to recover.

You should call your doctor if you experience any of these warning signs:

- You are using your reliever inhalers or nebuliser more often and they aren't giving you the same relief as they usually do.
- You are more short of breath than usual, making it difficult to do your usual daily activities.
- There is an increase in the amount of sputum, or if your sputum changes colour to yellow or green or is bloodstained.
- You are wheezing more than usual.
- You feel you are getting a cold and it is going to your chest
- You feel much more tired than usual.

If you are not sure **call your Doctor** and let them decide.

## Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

## Further information

**If you have any questions please contact**

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