

# How To Cope With Being Short of Breath - Breathing Exercises

People with lung problems often feel short of breath. Many daily tasks can make you breathless, such as walking, getting dressed, climbing stairs, or doing jobs around the house. Being breathless can make you panic or feel frightened.

Do not hold your breath when you do any of these things. This will make you feel more short of breath. Do not avoid doing things that make you breathless. Use the exercises in this leaflet instead, to help you control your breathing.

When you learn how to control your breathing these feelings will not trouble you as much and you will be able to do more. When you get breathless, **do not panic**. Your breathing will settle.

## Breathing Control

Breathing control means breathing gently, using the least effort. It will help you to use breathing control when you are short of breath or feeling fearful, anxious or in a panic. By using breathing control the effort of breathing is reduced.

### *How do I do breathing control?*

Get into a comfortable position so that you can relax. Make sure that your arms are supported. Use one of the positions in leaflet GL-01 'How To Cope With Being Short of Breath – Positions'.

- Breathe in gently through your nose and breathe out through your nose, if you can. If you cannot breathe out through your nose breathe out through your mouth instead.
- If you breathe out through your mouth you can use it with 'pursed lips breathing' (*right*)
- Try to let go of any tension in your body with each breath out

- Gradually try to make the breaths slower
- Closing your eyes may help you to focus on your breathing and relax
- Do not force your breath

## Relaxed slow deep breathing

Relaxed slow deep breathing is very useful when you are active. It should be used from the start of an activity that makes you out of breath. For example, walking or making the bed. It is not helpful to use this exercise if you are already very breathless.

### *How do I do relaxed slow deep breathing?*

As you start to exert yourself, slow down your breathing and breathe in more deeply. Breathe in through your nose if you can. Use it with pursed-lips breathing and /or 'blow-as-you-go'.

## Pursed-lips breathing

This exercise can be used at any time to help you control your breathing. You can also use it while you are doing something that makes you breathless and it will help you to feel less short of breath.

### *How do I do pursed lips breathing?*

Breathe in gently through your nose, then purse your lips as though you were going to blow out a candle or whistle. Blow out with your lips in this pursed position. Imagine "blowing out a candle" or whistling when you breathe out. Try to blow out for as long as is comfortable; do ►



► not force your lungs to empty.

### Blow-as-you-go

This exercise helps make tasks easier. You can use it while you are doing something that makes you breathless. You can use it with 'pursed lips breathing'.



### How do I do blow-as-you-go?

Breathe in before you make the effort. Then breathe out while making the effort. For example, when lifting a heavy bag, breathe in before you lift the bag and then breathe out through as you lift the bag - "blow as you go"!

It can be helpful to use pursed lips as you blow. Here are some other examples of when to use 'blow as you go':

- As you stretch your arms above your head to reach for something
- As you reach for something – such as a glass of water by your bed
- As you reach or bend down
- As you lift a heavy object or weight
- As you step up
- As you stand up
- During the most difficult part of any action

### Paced breathing

This is useful when you are active, for example, walking or climbing stairs. You pace your steps to your breathing. You can use it at the same time as pursed lips breathing and 'blow as you go'.

### How do I do paced breathing?

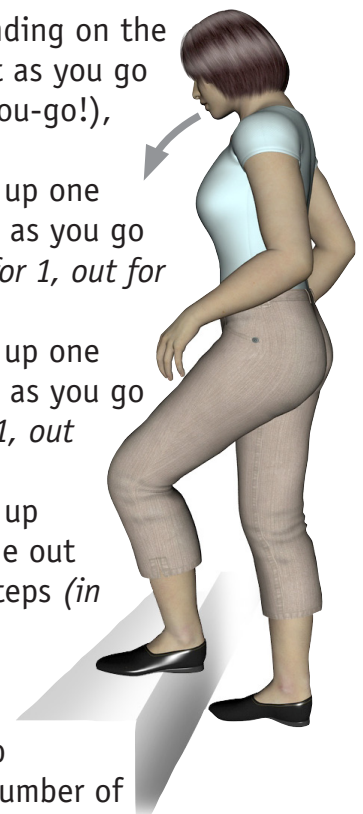
To use it when walking, count to yourself as you walk. For example, count 1 as you breathe

in and then count either 2 or 3 as you breathe out. You can count for longer as you breathe in or as you breathe out if that feels better for you.

The right number for you will depend on you and your lung condition. Your counting should be in time with the steps you take. Ask your physiotherapist to help you choose the right number to count to.

To use paced breathing while climbing stairs, breathe in and out in time with the steps you take. Do this in a rhythm that suits you. Here are some examples of how you could pace your breathing:

- breathe in when standing on the stair and breathe out as you go up a stair (blow-as-you-go!), or
- breathe in as you go up one step and breathe out as you go up another step (*in for 1, out for 1*)
- breathe in as you go up one step and breathe out as you go up two steps (*in for 1, out for 2*) or
- breathe in as you go up two steps and breathe out as you go up three steps (*in for 2, out for 3*)



Ask your physiotherapist to help you choose the right number of steps for you.

### When should I do my breathing exercises?

It is important to practice these exercises often so that you learn them. Then you will find you can use them more easily when you need them.

It is easier to practice them when you are not too short of breath. Practice them in one of the positions from the leaflet GL-01 'How To' ►

## ► Cope With Being Short of Breath – Positions’.

You will find some of the breathing exercises are more helpful to you than others and different ones work better in different situations.

If you become breathless during daily tasks you may find leaflet GL-03 ‘Energy Conservation’ helpful. The leaflet describes ways to make daily tasks easier. You can use the breathing exercises in this leaflet with the ideas to make everyday tasks easier.

Ask your physiotherapist to help you get these breathing exercises right.

## Useful contacts

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care  
[www.acprc.org.uk](http://www.acprc.org.uk)

British Thoracic Society  
[www.brit-thoracic.org.uk](http://www.brit-thoracic.org.uk)

British Lung Foundation  
[www.lunguk.org](http://www.lunguk.org)

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy  
[www.csp.org.uk](http://www.csp.org.uk)

Asthma UK  
[www.asthma.org.uk](http://www.asthma.org.uk)

Buteyko Breathing Association  
[www.buteykobreathing.org](http://www.buteykobreathing.org)

