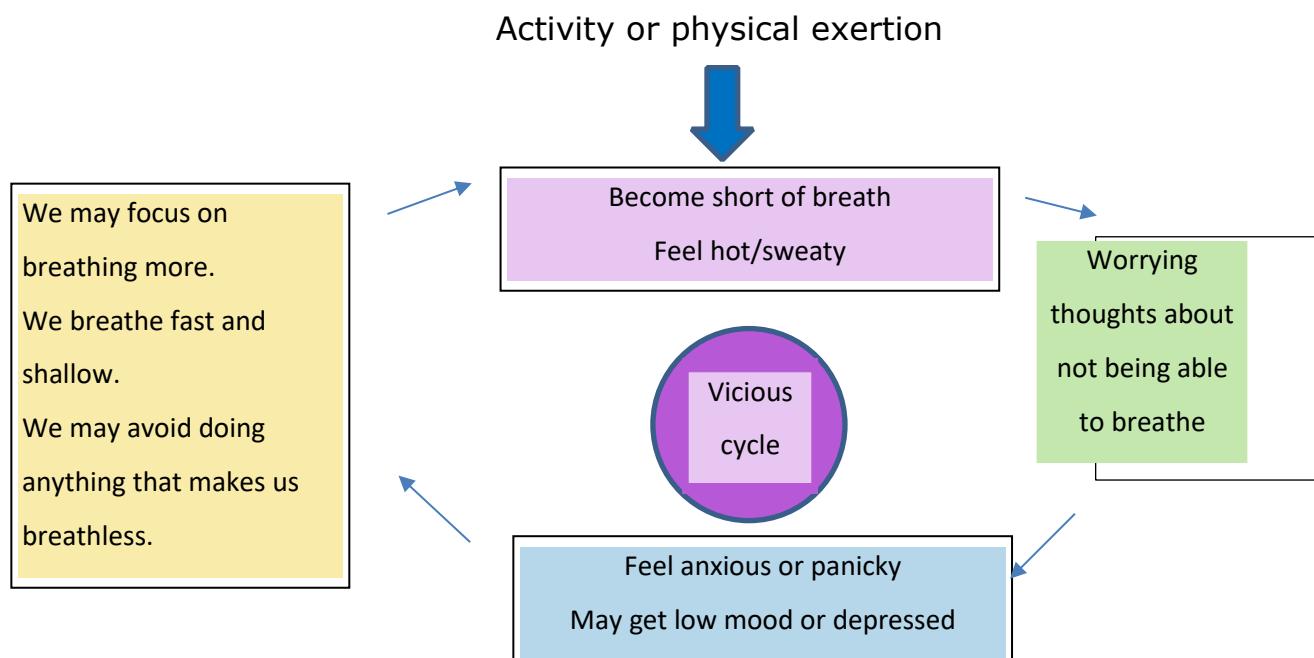


Top Tips for Managing Breathlessness.

Breathlessness is a common problem experienced by people who have lung conditions. We all get breathless from time to time when we are active or exert ourselves. It can be tempting to avoid doing things to avoid getting breathless. In the short term that works but in the long term it is a disaster. What matters is how you deal with breathlessness.

Keeping as physically active as you can is extremely important for your physical and mental wellbeing. You may be taking medication such as inhalers, which can help to a certain extent, but will not stop you from getting breathless. There are other strategies that can do to help control breathlessness.

When we are breathless it can be frightening and our body reacts by releasing adrenaline, which can make breathlessness worse. The faster the breathing, the smaller the breaths we take and the more anxious we can become. When we are really anxious panic attacks can occur and a vicious cycle can develop (see diagram below). We can also avoid doing things, which can lead to becoming unfit and possibly even feeling depressed

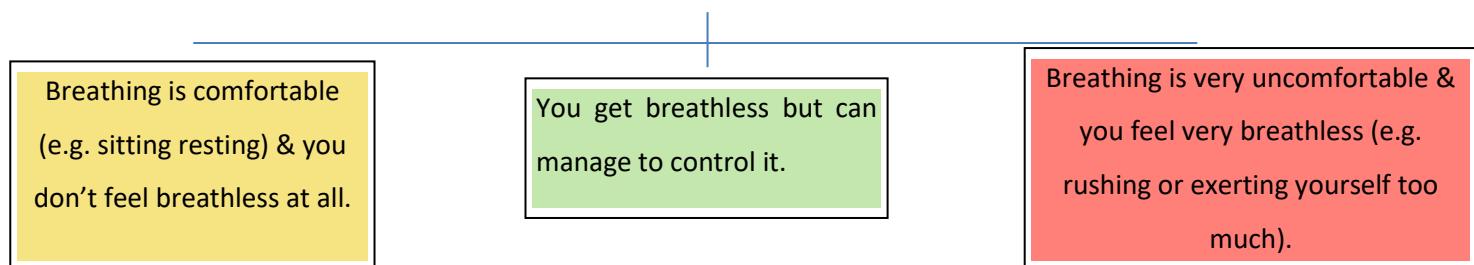


The trick is to learn to control your breathlessness and this can also help feeling anxious. This leaflet covers some top techniques that may help you if you practice them.

Tip 1 – Pace yourself

It is very tempting to rush to complete tasks you need to do, such as getting dressed or walking. Breathlessness often gets worse if you rush. It is important to pace yourself so you don't become too breathless that it becomes very uncomfortable. On a scale from 0-10 aim to get breathless around 5. Any more, then you are not pacing yourself and your

breathlessness can get out of
control. 5 10



If you tend to over-do things, pacing can help you keep active and manage your breathlessness, before you lose control of it.

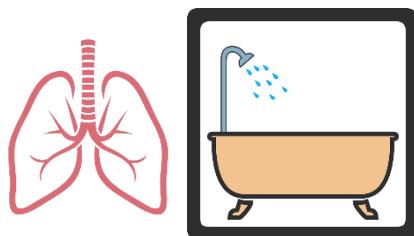
Tip 2 - When you get breathless stop, rest and relax.

Stop what you are doing, relax your shoulders, neck and chest otherwise these muscles will become tired. When you have gained control of your breathing you can carry on.



Tip 3 – Take control of your breathing.

When you get breathless you can take control of your breathing by concentrating on breathing out very slowly, gently and deeply. Think about a bath, you always empty the water out after a bath, so it is ready for the next time. This is the same with your lungs. Empty your lungs first, so you can get a good breath in. This can take some practice when you are feeling breathless but it works.



Tip 4 – Take your mind off your breathing (distract yourself)

Thinking about something else (distracting your mind), instead of focusing on your breathing can really help. There are lots of ways you can distract yourself e.g. counting backwards from 100 in sevens, counting how many green objects you can see, places you have visited etc. If you don't focus on your breathing, it settles down much quicker.



Tip 5 – Find a position that helps your breathing

There are certain positions that can help you breathe more easily e.g. leaning forward whilst you are sitting down, resting your arms on something such as a table or perhaps leaning on a shopping trolley.



Tip 6 – Learn to relax

Being tense is hard for our body & mind. Relaxation helps our breathing, heart and muscles. Learning to relax can take some practice but finding something that helps you relax can help your breathing, reduce tension and help us deal with the stressed and strains of life more easily.



Tip 7 - Keep as physically active as you can

Physical activity is essential for us physically and psychologically. When we are active, it is normal to get out of breath. You should aim to exercise at a moderate level for you (not too easy and not too hard). It is sometimes helpful to keep a little diary (or list) of what exercise you have done and note how long you did it for. On a scale of 0 – 5 (0 is no effort & 5 is too hard) aim for a level of 3 out of 5. As you build your fitness up may be able to do more. Or you can monitoring your steps each day with a pedometer. Build the steps up gradually.

Pulmonary rehabilitation is a special class available to people with breathing problems and can help you keep physically active. Ask your doctor or nurse if you haven't completed a course. The British Lung Foundation has more information on their website (<https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active>).



Tip 8 – If you have panic attacks tell yourself that panic attacks can't kill you.

When you are really breathless it is easy to panic. In fact around 6 out of 10 people with breathing problems feel anxious or panicky when they get breathless. During panic attacks you may feel that you can't breathe and are going to die. It feels like that at the time. Tell yourself that no-one has ever died of a panic attack, use distraction, breathing control and try to relax. Your breathing should settle down if you are having a panic attack.

Tip 9 – Use a hand held cool air fan (Do not use fans around others during COVID-19 to reduce risk of spreading the virus).

Hand held cool air fans can help your breathing. You will need to hold the fan about 6 inches away from your face. It is important to point the fan at your nose and mouth as it will stimulate the nerves in your face which helps you feel less breathless.



Tip 10 – Expect good days and bad days

When you have COPD you will have good days and bad days. On a good day it's tempting to do too much and you can suffer as a result of this and feel exhausted the next day. We call this 'boom and bust'. Getting the balance is important and this means not overdoing it on a good day so you have some energy on a bad day. Plan what you need to do and when you need to do it and get the balance right for you. These are just some

techniques that can help you manage your breathing better. If you have any questions please ask your nurse.

Tip 11 – Speak to your doctor or nurse if you are worried

If you have a medical condition you may need further treatment to control your symptoms. It may be that you have a chest infection or another problem that needs medical treatment. Phone your doctor or nurse if you have tried to use the techniques above and they do not work.

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