

Need more help?

This leaflet gives information to support you with managing your chronic breathlessness at home.

Living with breathlessness is difficult. If you need more help you can contact:

- ✓ Your GP or your Practice Nurse
- ✓ A heart failure specialist nurse if you have heart failure
- ✓ A community respiratory specialist, if lung disease

You can get general support from:

- ✓ NHS Volunteer Responders
0808 1963382
- ✓ Department of Health
gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable

Or you can find out more here:

- ✓ British Lung Foundation
blf.org.uk
- ✓ British Heart Foundation
bhf.org.uk
- ✓ Cambridge Breathlessness Intervention Service
cuh.nhs.uk/breathlessness

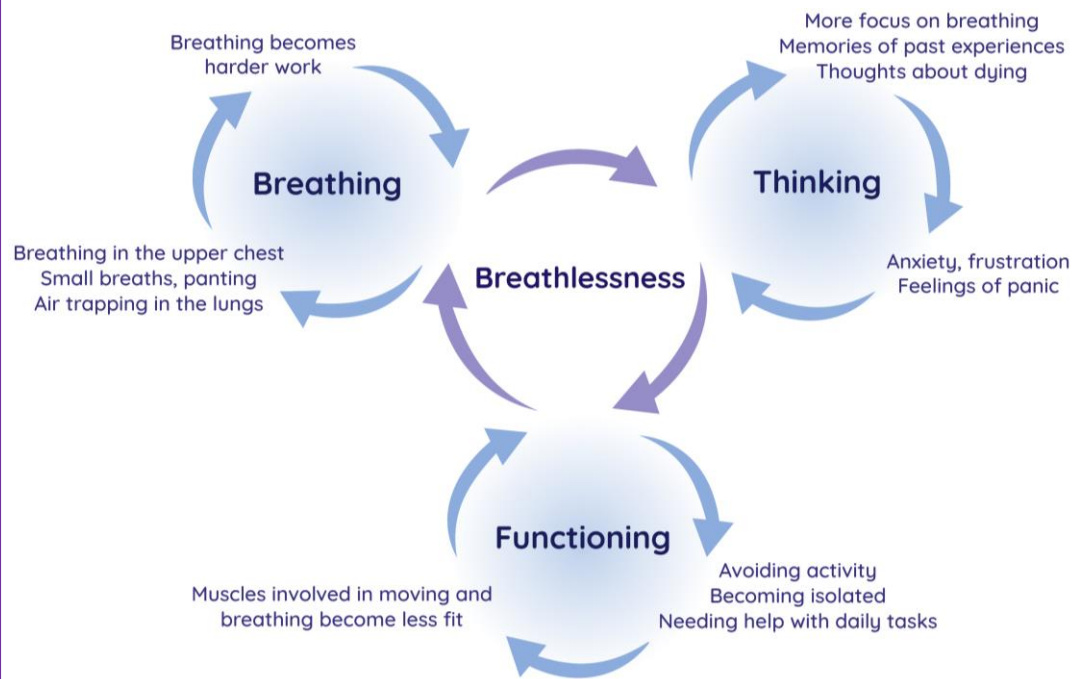
If you are unwell and think you might have COVID-19, please seek immediate help, using the online coronavirus service at 111.nhs.uk. If you cannot use the online service, please ring 111.

Understanding your breathlessness

Breathlessness usually starts because of an underlying condition, such as lung or heart disease. The healthcare team in your general practice or in hospital will try to treat this condition as well as possible.

For many people, the breathlessness does not go away, even with the best possible treatment of the underlying condition. The sense of breathlessness can also persist after a problem, like a lung infection, has settled. It is almost as if the breathlessness takes on a life of its own.

Why does this happen? For many people, the natural reactions to feeling breathless can lead to vicious cycles developing that worsen the breathlessness. Here are three of the commonest vicious cycles. Most people experience one or more of these at some point.



The good news is that these vicious cycles can be broken. A small change can turn a vicious cycle into a cycle of improvement, and make a big difference. This means that even if it is not possible to change the underlying condition, it is still possible to do small things that can help the breathlessness over time.

Managing chronic breathlessness while self-isolating at home during the COVID-19 pandemic

Are you living with long-term breathlessness because of an underlying condition, like lung or heart disease?

The coronavirus pandemic may mean that you are not getting your usual level of support. You might be having to shield yourself from others. It is quite normal to feel anxious in these circumstances.

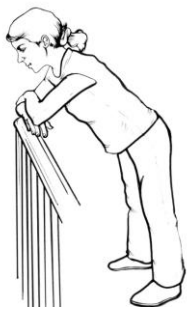
This leaflet gives information to help you manage your chronic breathlessness and any feelings of anxiety, while you are having to isolate yourself at home.

This information may also be helpful if you are recovering from COVID-19 and find that after a few weeks you are still feeling breathless when moving around, or you are more tired than usual.

Breathing

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

Try these comfortable positions to help your breathlessness



Lean forward resting on your arms while standing or sitting



Lie on your side with your head, arm and leg supported by pillows

Breathe gently and release any tension

- ✓ Soften and drop your shoulders with each breath out
- ✓ Breathe 'low and slow' from your tummy.

Consider cooling your face

- ✓ Wipe a damp cloth on your cheeks
- ✓ Open the window for a draft of cool fresh air
- ✓ You can use a small fan if there is no-one else around you.

Thinking

It is normal to feel frustrated and anxious. Finding ways to manage these can help ease the breathing.

Say the tranquillity poem slowly to yourself each day

Think about the word **tranquillity**. Say **tranquillity** three times in your mind.

Think about a colour associated with **tranquillity**. Imagine all the things this colour reminds you of.

Now imagine yourself in a place that brings a feeling of **tranquillity**.

What does it smell like in this place? What can you hear? Enjoy this feeling of **tranquillity**.

Miranda Thew

Remind yourself...

- ✓ It is normal to have worrying thoughts
- ✓ Thoughts and feelings will pass
- ✓ You can put them to one side.

You can be mindful in nature

- ✓ Notice the ever changing trees
- ✓ Listen to the birds singing
- ✓ Feel the breeze on your face.

Functioning

Making yourself a bit breathless by being active builds fitness, reducing breathlessness.

Count your steps and gradually build up activity

- ✓ Use a simple pedometer or a step counting App
- ✓ Measure the number of steps you take over a normal week
- ✓ Try to make your weekly steps 10% more than the week before
- ✓ After eight weeks you will have doubled your activity.

Try these exercises in your home

Sitting in a chair

As you breathe out, straighten your right knee slowly. Hold for three seconds, then release. Alternate with your left leg.

Standing up

Hold a secure object, breathe in. As you breathe out, bend your knees, with heels on the floor and back straight. Then stand up.

On the stairs

Stand in front of the first step. As you breathe out, step up then down. Alternate the leading leg.



Fatigue

Most people experiencing chronic breathlessness also feel very tired at times.

Find a routine with times of activity and times of rest

Think of your energy like a battery. Give your energy a chance to 're-charge' by balancing activity and rest.



Use the 5 Ps to help you manage your fatigue

Permission to do things differently and ask for help

Plan using lists or a diary

Pace by spreading out activities in the day

Prioritise your most important things

Posture including pushing things instead of pulling.

Develop helpful sleep habits

- ✓ Try setting regular times to go to sleep and to wake up
- ✓ Avoid coffee, alcohol and heavy food in the evening
- ✓ Keep a relaxing bedtime routine and a cool bedroom.