



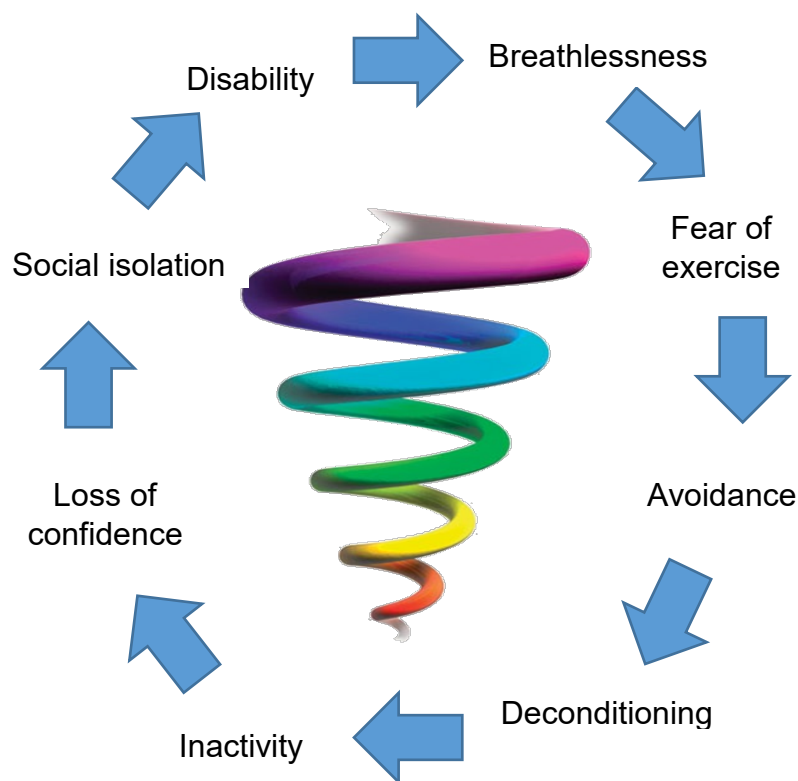
Managing breathlessness

This leaflet is for people experiencing breathlessness and gives advice to help you manage this, improve physical fitness and strength, and enhance your quality of life.

Importance of exercise

Exercise is important to keep the body healthy. The more inactive you become, the more your muscles become weaker and you get tired more easily. This is known as de-conditioning of the muscles.

If this downward spiral of inactivity continues, it can lead to a decrease in general fitness and a greater level of breathlessness with less effort. This can result in loss of confidence and social isolation.



If you exercise regularly, the benefits include:

- Reduced feeling of breathlessness.
- Stronger and more efficient muscles.
- Improved balance and co-ordination.
- Reduced anxiety and depression.
- Increased confidence and motivation.
- Better regulated appetite.
- Improved sense of wellbeing.
- Slowed progress of osteoporosis (weakening of the bones).
- Improved sleep.
- Lower blood pressure.
- Improved flexibility.
- Looser secretions in your airways.
- Improved posture.
- Lower cholesterol levels.

Exercise recommendations

To achieve improvements in your fitness that can be seen or felt, you need to complete a minimum of 5 sessions per week. Each daily session should be at least 20 minutes in total. This should be continued for a minimum of 6 weeks.

Once the desired level of fitness is established, you can reduce to a less vigorous programme of 3 sessions per week to maintain your current level.

However, if you stop you will return to lower level of fitness you had before quite rapidly.

BORG scale

When exercising we recommend being between approximately between 3 (moderate) and 6. Breathlessness should not exceed 7 (very severe).

Modified Borg Dyspnea Scale

0	Nothing at all	
0.5	Very, Very Slight (Just Noticable)	
1	Very Slight	
2	Slight	
3	Moderate	
4	Somewhat Severe	
5	Severe	
6		
7	Very Severe	
8		
9	Very, Very Severe (Almost Maximal)	
10	Maximal	

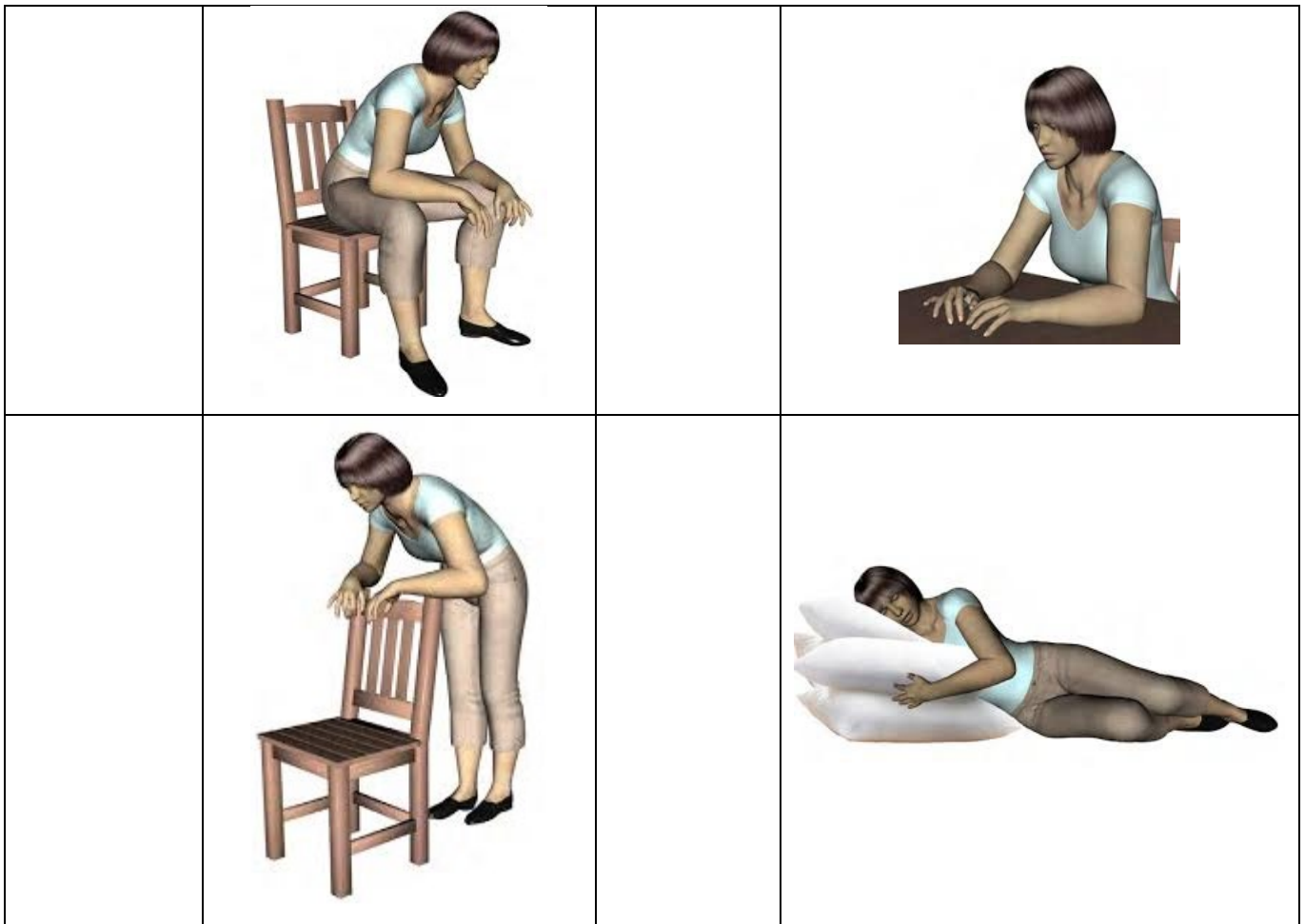
Managing breathlessness

How do I relieve my shortness of breath?

People who are deconditioned can often feel short of breath (SOB). Often, daily tasks such as walking, getting dressed or doing chores around the house can cause this breathlessness. Feeling as if you can't catch your breath can make you panic or feel frightened.

Learning to control these feelings of breathlessness is a skill that will help you to be less troubled by this and enable you to do more. When you are feeling breathless, do not panic. Your breathing will settle.

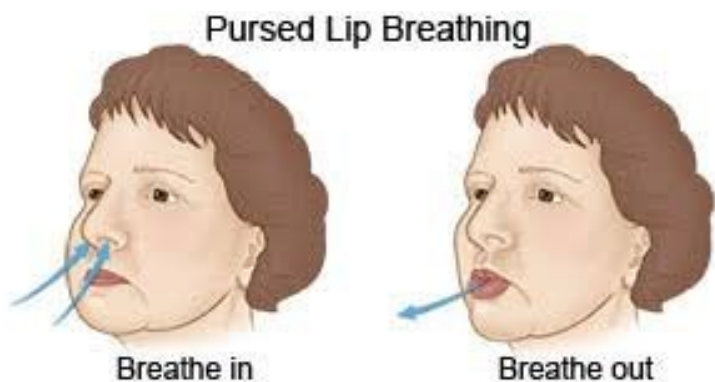
1. Try these positions of ease to help ease your breathlessness. When you are in any of these positions it is important to relax.



2. Using pursed lip breathing whenever you need help to control your breathing. You can use it while doing an activity that makes you short of breath.

How do I do pursed lip breathing?

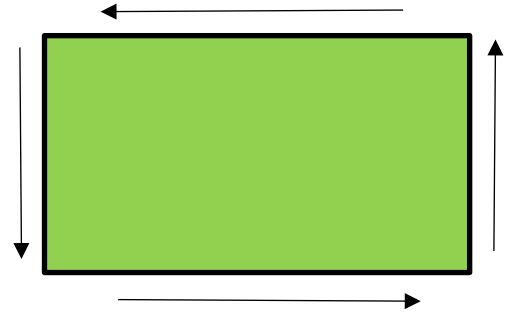
- Breathe in gently through your nose.
- Purse your lips as though you were going to blow out a candle or blow a whistle.
- Blow out with your lips in this pursed position.
- Try to blow out for as long as is comfortable without forcing your lungs to empty.



3. Breathing control is using the least effort to breathe gently. It will help you when feeling short of breath or fearful, anxious or panicked.

How do I do breathing control?

- Breathe in gently through your nose and breathe out through your nose, if you can. If this is too difficult, breathe out through your mouth instead.
- Try to let go of any tensions in your body with each breathe out.
- Gradually try to make each breath slower.
- Closing your eyes may help you to focus and relax.
- Do not force your breathing.
- To ensure your breath out is longer than your breath in you can try counting, in for 4, out for 7 or visualising a rectangle.



Useful resources:

- <https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/living-with/keeping-active/physical-activity>
- [How can I manage my breathlessness? | Asthma + Lung UK](#)
- [Supporting someone with breathlessness - Welcome to 'Supporting breathlessness'](#)

Contacting us

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To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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