



Coping with breathlessness: Breathing exercises

People with lung problems often feel short of breath.
Being breathless can make you panic or feel frightened.

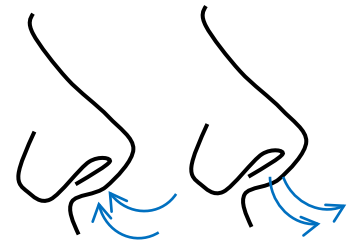
→ Do not hold your breath when you do daily tasks

→ Do not avoid doing things that make you breathless

Use the exercises in this leaflet instead, to help you control your breathing.

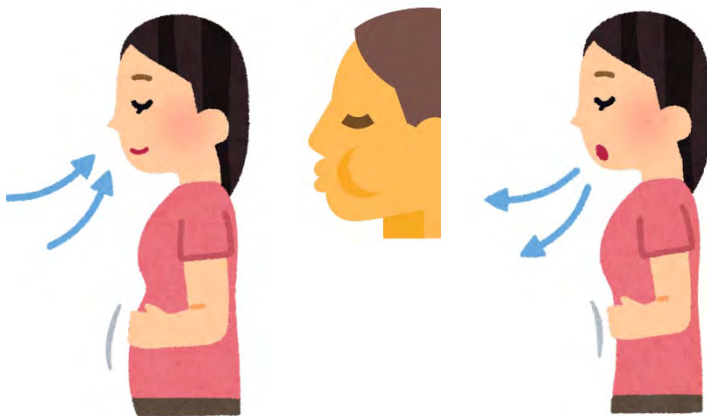
Breathing control

- Breathe in gently through your nose.
- Breathe out through your nose (or out through your mouth if you cannot breathe out through your nose).



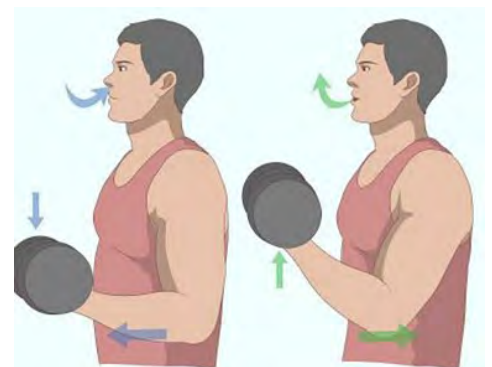
Pursed lip breathing

- Inhale (breathe in) slowly through your nose.
- Purse your lips (as if you are about to whistle).
- Exhale (breathe out) slowly through your pursed lips.
- Do not force your lungs to empty completely.



Blow-as-you-go

- Breathe in before you make an effort to do something.
- Breathe out while making the effort.
- For example, when lifting a heavy bag, breathe in before you lift the bag and then breathe out as you lift the bag – “blow as you go”.



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”.



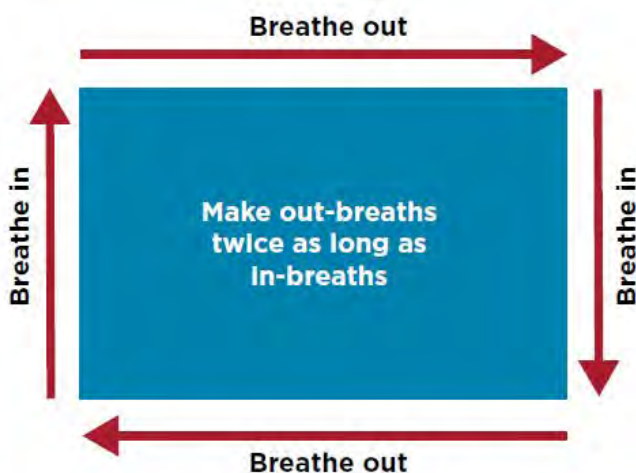
Paced breathing

- Count 1 as you breathe in and then count either 2 or 3 as you breathe out. You can count for longer if that feels better for you.
- Your counting should be in time with the steps you take.
- While climbing stairs, breathe in and out in time with the steps you take. Do this in a rhythm that suits you.



Rectangle breathing

- Find a rectangle in the room, e.g. door frame, phone, window etc.
- Focus on the short side and gently breathe in.
- Now breathe out through your mouth as your eyes follow along the longest side to the next corner.



Using Oromorph to help with breathlessness

Oromorph is liquid morphine that is taken by mouth. There is evidence that in small doses Oromorph is effective for treating long-term breathlessness.

Oromorph works quickly to relieve the feeling of being breathless; your doctor or nurse will tell you how often and how much to use.

As with all medicines, there are side effects. Not everyone will experience them.

Common side effects of using Oromorph include:

- Constipation
- Skin itching

- Feeling sleepy (drowsiness)
- Feeling sick (nausea)
- Dry mouth

Contact numbers

Respiratory Medicine Nursing Team
Department of Respiratory Medicine
Level 2, South Block Royal Berkshire Hospital
Telephone: 0118 322 3575
Mon-Fri 8.00am – 4.00pm.

If you experience breathlessness that can't be controlled, call 999 or go to the nearest emergency department (A&E).

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

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

RBFT Department of Respiratory Medicine, April 2026. Next review due: April 2028.