

BREATHLESSNESS



WHAT IS BREATHLESSNESS?

Breathlessness, also known as dyspnea, is a subjective sensation of difficulty or discomfort in breathing.

Breathlessness can vary from mild to severe and can be accompanied by other symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, rapid breathing, chest pain, or anxiety.

Breathlessness is a common symptom that can be caused by various underlying factors, ranging from acute to chronic.

POTENTIAL CAUSES OF BREATHLESSNESS



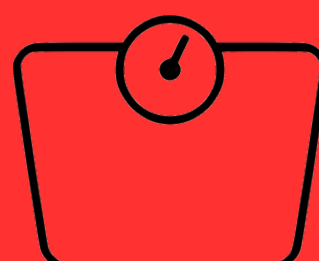
Physical exertion - Engaging in exercise or activities that require increased effort can lead to temporary breathlessness.



Respiratory - Various lung and respiratory conditions such as Asthma, Pneumonia, and COPD can cause breathlessness.



Anxiety/Panic disorders - Emotional factors like anxiety and panic attacks can cause breathlessness.



Obesity - Excessive weight can put extra strain on the respiratory system, leading to breathlessness, particularly during physical activity.



Cardiac conditions - Various heart related conditions such as Heart failure and heart arrhythmias can cause breathlessness



Other causes - Medications, allergic reactions, high altitude, Anemia or underlying metabolic conditions can also contribute to breathlessness.

IS BEING BREATHLESS OKAY?

When breathless it is important to decide if your level of breathlessness is okay or if you need to stop what you are doing.

Generally if you are short of breath but you can still hold a conversation you are okay to continue with the activity - This is called the talk test.

The below scale can help you understand your level of breathlessness.

RPE Scale (Rate of Perceived Exertion)	
1	Very light activity It doesn't even feel like you're exercising.
2-3	Light activity You could keep going for hours! It's easy to breathe and have a conversation.
4-6	Moderate activity You're breathing heavily, but you can have a conversation.
7-8	Somewhat difficult activity You're short of breath. You can speak, but only about one sentence at a time.
9	Very difficult activity You can barely breathe, and can only say a few words at a time.
10	Maximum effort activity You're completely out of breath, and can't talk.

MANAGING BREATHLESSNESS



HOW TO MANAGE BREATHLESSNESS



Breathlessness can be a difficult symptom to live with and can make you feel anxious and frightened

Managing breathlessness depends on the underlying cause and severity but there are some general strategies that can help.

If you experience persistent or worsening breathlessness it is important to consult a healthcare professional.



PRIORITISE, PLAN, PACE.

If you suffer from Chronic Breathlessness it is important to manage your daily routine.

Use the three P's to help conserve your energy and manage your breathlessness.

Prioritise: Prioritise your energy for enjoyable activities. Choose the 'must do' tasks for the day. Leave less important task for another day or ask for help.

Plan: Plan your week ahead rather than trying to do everything in one day. Try to avoid rushing to reduce the feeling of being anxious, breathless, and fatigued.

Pace: Pace yourself and take a rest between tasks. Working at a slower pace will use less oxygen and less energy which means you will be less breathless. Use pacing techniques on slopes and stairs.



POSITIONING

When you feel breathless, adopting a comfortable position can be helpful. Different positions can help you relax and improve your breathing.

Try these different positions below and see what works for you. Try to become familiar with the positions so you can use them depending on where you are or what you are doing.



Sit upright/sit leaning forward.



Standing up against a wall and look down towards the ground with your shoulders relaxed.



Stand and lean forward onto a table, window ledge or other sturdy surface.

BREATHING CONTROL

The main muscle used when breathing is called your Diaphragm. Breathlessness can cause you to breathe with your upper chest and shoulder muscles rather than your Diaphragm. This results in fast shallow breathing.

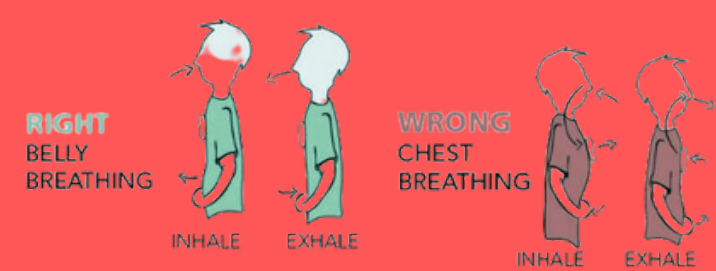
The breathing exercise below (Tummy Breathing) can help you to take deeper breaths and ease your breathlessness. It is good to practice this even when you are not breathless.

1. Sit/ lie in a comfortable position with your shoulders relaxed.

2. Place one hand on your tummy and the other relaxed by your side.

3. Breathe in through your nose, feeling your tummy rise under your hand as you breathe in. Breathe in through your mouth if you are unable to breathe through your nose.

4. Breathe out slowly and feel your tummy sink back down. Your chest and shoulders shouldn't move much at all.



5. Repeat 5-10 times until you feel relaxed and not breathless.

