

# **A Guide to Managing Breathlessness**



**St Michael's House Physiotherapy  
Department**

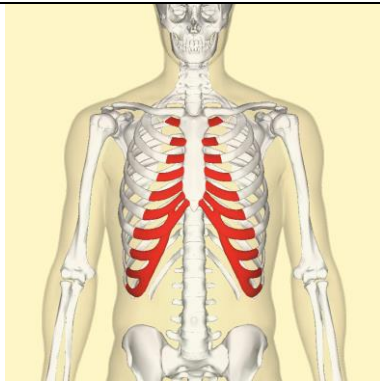
# The Lungs



Where are my lungs?

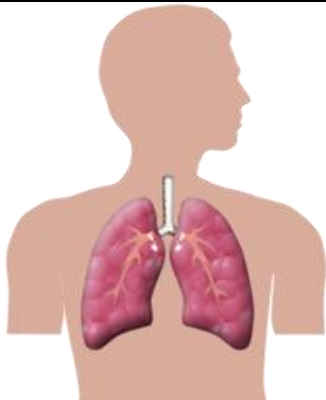


Your lungs lie under the bones in your chest.



These bones are called your ribs

Wherever you feel a rib, there is part of your lung underneath!



There is one lung on the left and one lung on the right.

They start around your collarbones and end near your waist.



**What do the lungs do?**

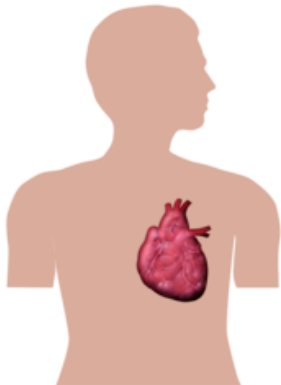


**Your lungs' take in oxygen from the air and send this gas to your bloodstream.**

**We need oxygen to live. Oxygen is in the air all around us.**







**When you breathe in, you suck air into your lungs.**



**The lungs take the oxygen from the air and bring it to your heart.**

**The heart pumps it around your body giving us energy for activities.**

# Breathlessness

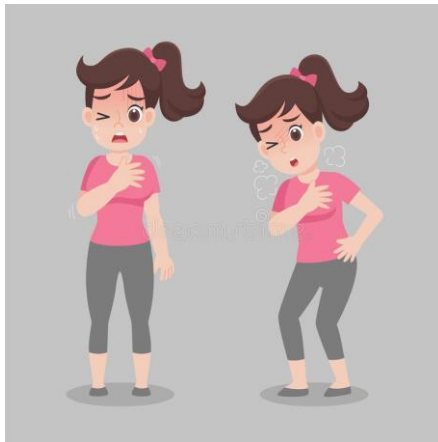
	<p>What is breathlessness?</p>
	<p>Breathlessness is when you get short of breath or find it difficult to breathe</p>
	<p>It is normal to get breathless especially when we are exercising</p> <p>You might get breathless when you are climbing the stairs or running for a bus!</p>
	<p>Remember- Not all breathlessness is bad for you!</p>



Who gets breathless?

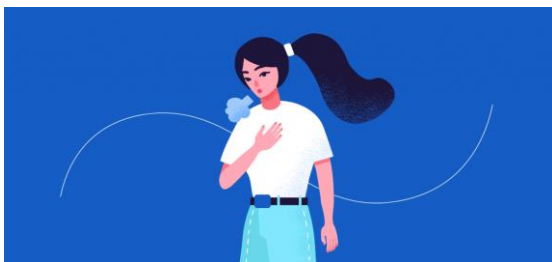


We can all get short of breath from time to time



Some people get out of breath every day even when they are not exercising

This is called long term breathlessness or chronic breathlessness



Some people get out of breath suddenly and for a short time

This is called short term breathlessness or acute breathlessness



How do you feel when you get out of breath



You might feel hot when you are short of breath



You might feel like your chest is tight or sore when you are short of breath



You might feel scared or frightened when you get out of breath

# What is the Best Way to Breathe?



Most of us only use the top half our lungs when we breathe.

This is called shallow breathing and is very difficult to do.



The best way of breathing uses the bottom half of the lungs, which also uses your tummy







This is called deep breathing and is used by all singers, actors and public speakers



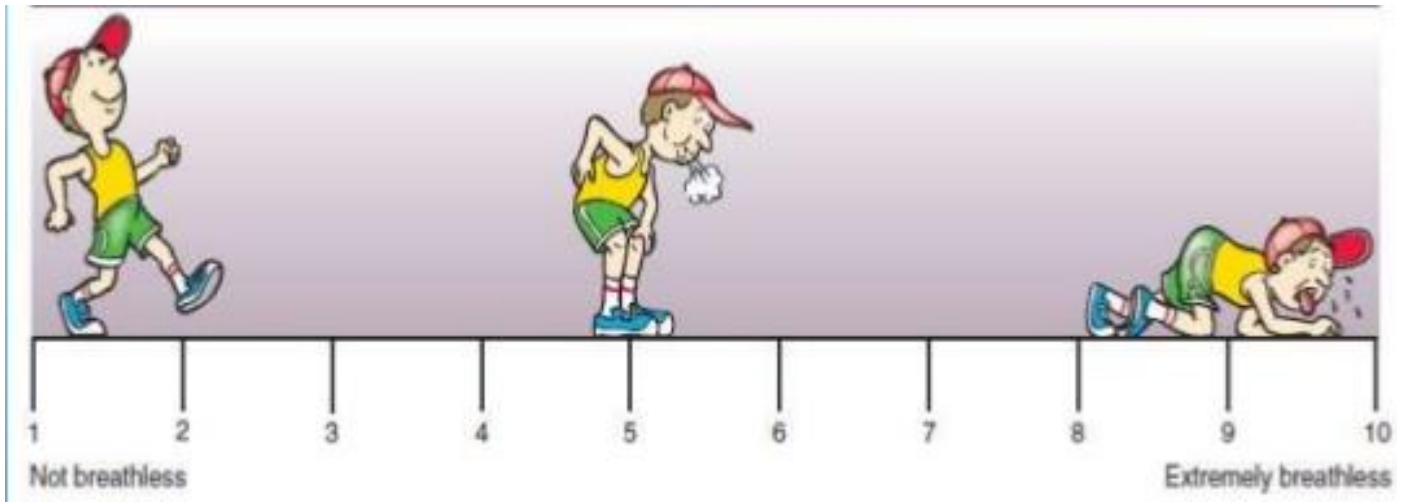
Physical exercise also makes us breathe deeply, using the bottom of our lungs.

# How Can we Decide What Level of Breathlessness is Ok?

 <p>Be active</p>	<p>Staying active and exercising is very important</p> <p>You might get breathless when you exercise or when you are doing physical activity</p>
	<p>If you get short of breath you should decide if the level is ok or if you should stop what you are doing</p>
	<p>If you are short of breath but you can still talk or have a conversation you are ok to continue the activity.</p> <p>This is called the talk test.</p>
 <p>GP Surgery</p>	<p>If you are short of breath and not able to hold a conversation when you are active you might need to see your physiotherapist or doctor</p>



Use this chart to help you to decide how breathless you are:



A score of **1** means you are doing very light activity. A little more than watching tv or sleeping

A score of **2-3** means you are doing light activity. You find it easy to breathe and to have a conversation


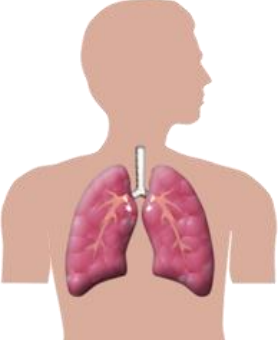

A score of **4-6 means** you are doing activity which is medium. You are breathing heavily but you can have a short conversation. You are noticing your breathing becoming more of a challenge

A score of **7-8** means you are doing a hard activity. You are a bit uncomfortable. You are short of breath and can speak a sentence

A score of **9** means you are doing a very hard activity. You can barely breathe and can only speak a few words

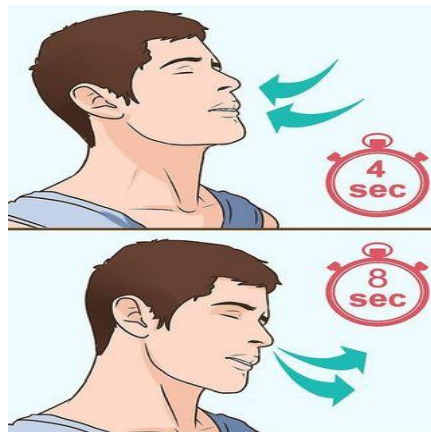
A score of **10** means you are doing the hardest activity you can. It feels like you cannot keep going. You are out of breath and you can't talk.

# How to Help your Breathlessness

	<p>Learning how to breathe in deeply can help your breathlessness</p>
	<p>Tummy breathing or diaphragmatic breathing is breathing from the bottom of your lungs</p>
	<p>This is a type of deep breathing and can be very relaxing when done correctly.</p> <p>This is good to practice when you are NOT breathless.</p> <p>You can then try do it at times throughout the day.</p>


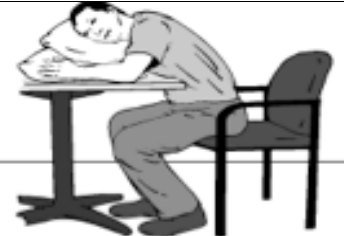


Ask somebody to read this box out to you and try it yourself at home.

- Start by checking that your mouth, shoulders and chest are relaxed.
- Put one hand on your chest bone
- Put the other hand on your tummy.
- Breathe in slowly, through your nose if possible...
- Feel your hand on your tummy rise
- The hand on your breastbone should barely move.
- Keep the shoulders relaxed. Count to 4 as you breathe in.
- Then...breathe out through relaxed lips
- Slowly breathe out and count to 8.
- Repeat: Breathe in for 4, breathe out for 8.



# How to Help your Breathlessness

- Once you have practiced deep breathing you can try the following positions which can help your shortness of breath. See which one works best for you

	<p>Sitting on a chair, lean forward and rest your hands on your knees.</p> <p>Practice your deep breathing.</p>
	<p>Sitting on a chair, lean forward and rest your body on a table with some pillows.</p> <p>Practice your deep breathing</p>
	<p>Standing up, rest your body against a wall and look down towards the ground with your shoulders relaxed</p> <p>Practice your deep breathing</p>
	<p>Standing up, steady yourself with one leg in front and lean on to a table</p> <p>Make sure the table doesn't move</p>

