

Managing Breathlessness 2: Handheld fan

The information given below is designed to help you manage your stable long-term breathlessness. If your breathing is getting worse or you are experiencing breathlessness as a new feeling, it is important to seek medical advice.

Will using a fan help my breathlessness?

When breathless, you may instinctively go to an open door or window to 'get some fresh air'. In a similar way, a cool draught of air from a handheld fan can reduce the feeling of breathlessness. The fan can therefore be seen as a 'portable breath of fresh air'.



The following may also help ease breathlessness:

- A cool flannel or cool water mist spray to the face.
- Opening windows, for example in a car.
- Desktop or floor standing fans.

How does facial cooling ease breathlessness?

Research has shown that cooling the face with a fan is effective at reducing breathlessness. It is thought that cooling the cheek, nose and mouth areas sends a message to the brain which reduces the feeling of breathlessness.

How should I use the handheld fan?

1. Adopt a comfortable position that eases your breathlessness.
2. Hold the fan approximately 15cm (or 6 inches) away from the face.
3. Aim the draught of air towards your face and move the fan slowly from side to side so that the draught covers the nose, mouth and sides of both cheeks.
4. Use it until you feel your breathing ease.

Fans with three or more rotating blades seem to be most effective as the airflow is stronger. Some people have to use the fan for just a minute, others for 10 minutes, before they feel their breathlessness ease. The fan can be used at the same time as nasal oxygen. People using face mask oxygen have commented that cooling the cheeks, neck and upper chest with the fan helps to ease their breathing.

When should I use the fan?

You can use the fan whenever you feel breathless. Keep the fan in your pocket when out and about so you have it to hand when needed. Keep a handheld fan by your bedside so it is in easy reach if you wake at night.

You may find it helpful to use the fan with other breathlessness management techniques such as positioning, breathing techniques, relaxation and mindfulness. Other leaflets in this series provide further details.

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Useful sources of information

Contact us

Interstitial Lung Disease Service

t: 020 7188 8635 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

e: gst-tr.khpildservice@nhs.net

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

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