

## Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

## 2. Breathing difficulties

Breathlessness can have different causes and its treatment depends on its cause. It can occur if the lungs are affected by cancer itself, or if radiotherapy treatment or chemotherapy has caused inflammation or scarring (fibrosis) in the lung tissue. Breathlessness can also result from other medical conditions, such as anaemia, fluid in the lungs, pleural effusion (fluid in the membranes covering the lungs) or, more commonly, a chest infection.

Breathlessness may occur suddenly or may gradually develop over weeks or months. It can be frightening and distressing to live with and can have an effect on all areas of a person's life. It can cause feelings of anxiety and panic that often makes the patient feel their breathing is worse. Basic daily activities such as washing and dressing, or emotional distress such as fear or anger can trigger breathlessness so it can help to learn to manage these things better.

### How can I manage my breathing difficulties?

- If you are particularly worried about your breathing speak to your doctor or nurse. They may be able to prescribe a medicine to help with your breathlessness or, if appropriate, provide you with oxygen.
- Sit down when washing, dressing or preparing food.
- Resist the temptation to hold your breath when dressing and undressing.
- Avoid bending down, make use of equipment and aids such as grip bars or walking frames. An occupational therapist may be able to come to your home to assess which aids may be helpful for you. Referral to an occupational therapist can be made by your GP or hospital doctor.
- Keep items that you use often within easy reach around your home. To help you to reach items, you can get a pick-up stick from the occupational therapist at the hospital (though this is only available to in-patients).
- Wear loose clothing around your waist and chest.
- Increase the flow of air around you by opening windows or using a fan.
- Don't have baths that are too hot, and avoid using a shower on your face.
- Pace activities throughout the day to conserve energy. Plan or set goals for activities and balance periods of rest with those of activities.
- When climbing up stairs or a slope, breathe in on one step, and on the next step breathe out and then wait a moment. Then repeat.
- Pause before speaking and after each sentence. Sit down and catch your breath before answering the telephone. Using a cordless or mobile phone means that you will not have to rush to answer the phone. A baby monitor enables you so speak to someone in another room.
- If having sex, it can be easier if you are aware of activities or positions that are less likely to make you feel breathless.

## 2. Breathing difficulties continued

- Consider using a wheelchair for long distances. If you are an in-patient with long term mobility problems you can get a wheelchair from your occupational therapist at the hospital otherwise contact organisations such as the British Red Cross, Assist UK or the Disabled Living Foundation.
- Make relaxation part of your daily routine. If your breathlessness is made worse by strong emotions (such as anxiety or panic), it may be helpful to see a counsellor who can help you to understand and deal with the emotions that cancer can cause

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# 2. Breathing difficulties - Resources/Information

### Local Resources:

<p>Bideford :Marlborough Court (Common Room), Park Lane Bideford Devon EX39 2QN <b>This group is supported by the NDDH Respiratory team</b> <b>For further information telephone: 03000 030 555</b> Website: <a href="http://www.blf.org.uk">www.blf.org.uk</a> Email address: <a href="mailto:southwest@blf.org.uk">southwest@blf.org.uk</a></p>	<p>The <b>Breathe Easy</b> support group network provides support and information for people living with a lung condition, and for those who look after them. Breathe Easy groups are run by members, with help and support from <b>British Lung Foundation</b> regional teams. Every group is different, but many make sure that there are lots of opportunities to have fun and socialise– and perhaps have the occasional day out.</p>
<p>The Voice Community Choir, Barnstaple Rugby Club Pottington Road, Barnstaple EX31 1JH Every Wednesday 7.15pm— 9pm £7 per session</p>	<p>Come and join a group of enthusiastic people from all walks of life who love to sing – no experience necessary. We come together weekly to sing purely for the enjoyment of making music.</p>
<p>Saturday S.o.B Club( Shortness of Breath) Every 1st Saturday of the month March to November Wrafton Church Hall 2-4pm</p>	<p>This club provides support to people suffering from lung disease or other conditions resulting in breathlessness. For more information-please contact either <b>Ali on 01271 890217</b> or <b>Val 01271 831411</b></p>

### National Resources:

<p><b>The Roy Castle Charity</b> <a href="http://www.roycastle.org">www.roycastle.org</a> Lung cancer helpline <b>0333 322 7200</b></p>	<p>Provides help and advice for those with lung cancer.</p>
<p><b>British Lung Foundation</b> t Telephone: <b>03000 030 555</b> <a href="https://www.blf.org.uk/">https://www.blf.org.uk/</a></p>	<p>Established for over 30 years the BLF is the only UK charity looking after the nation’s lungs!</p>
<p><a href="https://soundcloud.com/macmillancancer/sets/relax-and-breathe">https://soundcloud.com/macmillancancer/sets/relax-and-breathe</a></p>	<p>Listen to MP3 files via this link, to hear Macmillan Relax and Breathe CD. Booklet MAC 12918 on Macmillan website at PDF.</p>
<p><b>Macmillan Cancer Support Line</b> <a href="http://www.macmillan.org.uk">www.macmillan.org.uk</a> Call <b>0808 808 00 00</b> — 7 days a week 8am—8pm</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. Please note that calls to this number are not free when made from outside the UK. If you are calling from outside of the UK call on <b>+44 207 091 2230</b></p>
<p><a href="#">Macmillan on-line Community</a></p>	<p>Online support— to share experiences</p>
<p><b>Marie Curie Support Line</b> — Living with a terminal illness and looking for support <a href="http://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support">www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support</a></p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. The Support Line is open 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday and 11am – 5pm Saturday</p>

### Other Resources :

<p>Macmillan— Relax and breathe CD <b>MAC5812</b></p>	<p>Marie Curie— Relaxation</p>
<p>Macmillan— Managing the symptoms of cancer <b>MAC11761</b></p>	<p>Roy Castle - Living with Lung Cancer</p>
<p>Marie Curie— Breathlessness and how to control breathing</p>	<p>Roy Castle—Managing Lung Cancer Symptoms</p>