



BTS/ACPRC Guideline
Physiotherapy management of the adult, medical, spontaneously breathing patient
Web Appendix 5 – Respiratory (chest) physiotherapy for people with
Hyperventilation Syndrome or Disordered Breathing

www.brit-thoracic.org.uk

Breathlessness can be very distressing and frightening. This can occur if you have what can be termed disordered breathing, dysfunctional breathing or Hyperventilation Syndrome. If you have this condition, you may be aware of any or all of these symptoms:

- Breathlessness after only slight exertion or minimal exercise
- Feelings of 'air hunger' – a sensation of not being able to fill your lungs to the top
- Feeling breathless when talking
- Yawning or sighing a lot
- Palpitations
- Light-headedness/dizziness
- Aching and tightness in the muscles around the neck and shoulders
- Feeling bloated
- Pins and needles in your hands or arms or around your mouth

What might help?

Breathing retraining can be very helpful. Ask to see a physiotherapist who specialises in treating your condition.

What can I do for myself?

You need to practice breathing retraining as taught by your physiotherapist every day; however, this may be for a very short period at first. Retraining your breathing takes time. You may need several visits with the physiotherapist over a number of weeks, so don't give up!

How do I retrain my breathing?

Choose a comfortable position to practise in; this could be sitting with your feet up, lying on your side or your back. Many people like to lie on their back with pillows under their head and knees. Let your shoulders, arms and hands relax; let all the tension out of your body. It may help you to close your eyes, to listen to gentle music or a relaxation tape or CD.

Take small, slow, gentle breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. Let the air out gently and try to have a very short pause between each breath. Allow your stomach to gently rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out, with each breath. It may help to place your hand on your stomach and think about allowing the breath to get down to where your hand is positioned. This only requires a very small breath and you should feel your hand rising slightly when you breathe in. Let your breath "go" as you breathe out. This doesn't require any effort from you and you should feel your stomach and hand falling back down.

These exercises are designed to slow your breathing down and help you to take smaller breaths. Because you normally breathe too quickly and/or too deeply you may find this difficult at first. Again, persevere and don't give up.

Who should I contact if I do not have a physiotherapist?

If you speak to your GP, asthma nurse or specialist doctor, they should be able to refer you to a physiotherapist or other health care professional who specialises in breathing problems.

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Useful Contacts

Your physiotherapist is _____

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care
www.acprc.org.uk

British Thoracic Society
www.brit-thoracic.org.uk

British Lung Foundation
www.lunguk.org

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
www.csp.org.uk

Asthma UK
www.asthma.org.uk

Buteyko Breathing Association
www.buteykobreathing.org

Physiotherapy for Hyperventilation
www.physiohypervent.org

NHS free smoking helpline **0800 0224332**
www.smokefree.nhs.uk