

Breathlessness Support

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 from your GP.

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 cheeks, 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 side to side so the draught covers the nose, mouth and sides of the 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.

If you have oxygen then 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.

Reference

Galbraith S, Fagan P, Perkins P, Lynch, A & Booth S (2010) Does the use of a handheld fan improve chronic dyspnea? A randomised, controlled, crossover trial. **Journal of Pain and Symptom Management** Vol 39, Issue 5, pp.831-838.

Further information

The hand-held fans most commonly used by breathlessness services are 3 bladed hand held fans and are available to buy from stores such as Boots and Marks & Spencer. However, you may wish to use a different make or model that suits your needs. If you have any questions about buying a handheld fan please discuss this with your healthcare professional.

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Acknowledgement

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