

Patient Information Leaflet

Physiotherapy Department

Positioning for Breathless Patient

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Positioning

Your physiotherapist may advise using different positions to ease breathlessness.

These positions are helpful when you experience shortness of breath during activity, exacerbation of your respiratory disease, due to adverse weather conditions or when you feel anxious and need to relax.

These positions optimise the use of the diaphragm and encourage relaxation of the shoulders, arms and upper chest.

This leaflet recommends different positions which you can adopt in lying, sitting and standing to ease breathlessness.

Please refer to the video link on YouTube to follow the positions (PLYMOUTHNHSPHYSIO):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxnX38Nk-FA>

Resting positions

The following positions may help if you are breathless at rest or if you are feeling very tired or exhausted from breathlessness.

High side lying

Make sure you are fully over on your side. Resting your upper arm on a pillow may also help.

Side lying with pillows with your lower shoulder brought slightly forward. Head and knees should be comfortably supported.

Knees should be slightly bent and you may find it comfortable to position a pillow between your knees.



Forward lean positions

- **Forward lean in bed**

Place one or two pillows on your lap in front of you, lean forward folding your arms across and resting your head onto the pillows. You may turn your head to one side.

Relax down onto the pillows as much as possible. Having your legs apart or bent may also help.

You can also do this sitting in a chair and placing the pillows on a table in front of you.



- **Forward lean sitting at the edge of the bed**

Place your feet flat on the floor and rest your hands on the edge of the bed.

You can also place your forearms onto your legs so that you are leaning forward whilst sat in a chair or at the edge of the bed.

Leaning against a wall in standing

In standing lean your hips against a wall and rest your hands on your thighs.



Try to avoid raising shoulders or tightening your neck muscles.

How they work

Forward lean positions fix the shoulders still to support the breathing accessory muscles so they can pull on your ribs to help draw the air in. Leaning forward may also improve the movement of your diaphragm.

When to use

Use a forward lean position to help you recover from breathlessness after activity.

When using these positions try to keep your back straight but let your head drop so your neck is relaxed. Also try to relax your wrists.

If you have any adverse reaction such as your breathlessness getting worse or you are experiencing a new onset of breathlessness stop using these positions and seek medical advice.

Please use these positions only if assessed and advised by a Physiotherapist.

This information sheet is available in large print and other formats and languages. Please contact:

Physiotherapy Department

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