

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.
- 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 or clinical psychologist who can help you to understand and deal with the emotions that cancer can cause (*See Worry, Fear or Anxiety elsewhere in this Directory*)

- Some people with severe breathlessness can find eating difficult and this alongside an increased respiratory rate can result in weight loss. Soft foods which are easy to chew and swallow and nourishing drinks can help to overcome this. Small frequent snacks and assistance with shopping and cooking may also be of help.

Local Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<p>Breathe Easy Plymouth (British Lung Foundation) – Support Group Breathe easy groups provide support and information for people living with a lung condition and for those who look after them</p>	<p>Breathe Easy Plymouth Tothill Community Centre Knighton Road St Judes Plymouth PL4 9DA Helpline: 03000 030 555</p>
<p>Mustard Tree Cancer Support & Triangle Drop In Centres Ask questions, share concerns, offers a range of services including benefits advice. Support, advice and information for cancer patients and their carers</p>	<p>Mustard Tree, Derriford Hospital: Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm 01752 430060/01752 431468 Kingsbridge: Tuesdays 10am to 4pm 01548 852349 Liskeard: Thursdays 10am to 4pm 01579 373500 Tavistock: Fridays 10am to 4pm 01822 615935</p>
<p>Livewell South West: Panic This workshop aims to break down some of the myths surrounding panic and help you to manage your panic attacks. Mindfulness Mindfulness practice can help you develop the ability to deal with life’s pressures. Mindfulness meditation is a skill you can develop and a form of self-awareness training that helps you get to know yourself more fully, think more clearly and in the present moment.</p>	<p>Livewell South West: To book a place on any of the 1 hour workshops please call: Tel: 01752 435419 or Email: plymouthoptions@nhs.net</p>
<p>Other Resources</p>	<p>Your GP, Oncology Doctor, Physiotherapist, Occupational therapist, Specialist nurse or District Nurse.</p>

National Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<p>The Roy Castle Charity Provides help and advice for those with lung cancer.</p>	<p>www.roycastle.org lung cancer helpline 0333 322 7200</p>
<p>Macmillan Cancer Support Provide comprehensive advice and information on all aspects of cancer.</p>	<p>www.macmillan.org.uk 0808 808 0000 (Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm)</p>

Further information:

<p>Macmillan Cancer Support booklets: – available free from the Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre</p>	<p>Marie Curie Leaflets: available free from www.mariecurie.org.uk</p>
Controlling the symptoms of cancer	Breathlessness: How to control your breathing Relaxation
Talking about your cancer	
How are you feeling?	
Understanding chemotherapy	
Understanding radiotherapy	
Understanding lymphoedema	
Managing Breathlessness MAC12918	
Relax and Breathe CD MAC5812	