

## Leaflet 2: Hand-held fan

### Breathlessness Intervention Service

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 hand-held 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 hand-held fan?

Adopt a comfortable position that eases your breathlessness.

1. Hold the fan approximately 15 centimetres (six inches) away from the face.
2. 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.
3. Use it until you feel your breathing ease.

Some people have to use the fan for just a minute, others for 10 minutes, before they feel their breathlessness ease.

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 hand-held 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 or relaxation. Other leaflets in this series provide further details.

## References

Qian Y et al Fan therapy for the treatment of dyspnea in adults: a systematic review. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*. 2019;58(3):481-486

Galbraith S, Fagan P, Perkins P, Lynch, A & Booth S (2010) [Does the use of a hand-held fan improve chronic dyspnea? A randomized, controlled, crossover trial. \(opens in a new tab\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20471544/)

Link: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20471544/>

*Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*. 2010;39(5):831-838

## Further information

For further help or advice contact the [Breathlessness Intervention Service](https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/our-services/breathlessness-intervention-service/)

Link: <https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/our-services/breathlessness-intervention-service/>

on 01223 274404, 09:00 (9am) to 17:00 (5pm) Monday to Friday.

---

## Document details

Approved	05 Sep 2024
Version number	11
Document ID	1110
Service / Department	Breathlessness intervention service (BIS), Palliative care

---

## We are smoke-free

Smoking is not allowed anywhere on the hospital campus. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

## Other formats

Help accessing this information in other formats is available. To find out more about the services we provide, please visit our patient information help page (see link below) or telephone 01223 256998. [www.cuh.nhs.uk/contact-us/accessible-information/](http://www.cuh.nhs.uk/contact-us/accessible-information/)

## Contact us

Cambridge University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust  
Hills Road, Cambridge  
CB2 0QQ

Telephone +44 (0)1223 245151  
<https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/contact-us/contact-enquiries/>

This document was correct at the time of printing - 18-03-2025 09:27