

Leaflet 4: Positions to ease breathlessness

Breathlessness Intervention Service

The information below is designed to help you manage your stable long-term breathlessness. If you feel your breathing is getting worse, or you are experiencing breathlessness as a new feeling, it is important to seek advice from your GP.

Certain positions may help to ease breathlessness at rest, or after activity. Such positions often place the breathing muscles in a better position to help with breathing. For more information on the muscles of breathing see [Leaflet 3](#)

Link: <https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/patient-information/breathing-techniques-to-ease-breathlessness/> in this series. Commonly used positions are suggested below; however, you may find other positions of ease which are not pictured. Experiment with, and modify, different positions until you find what works best for you.

Resting positions

The following positions may help if you feel breathless at rest or feel tired or exhausted.

Supported in an armchair



Your head should be fully supported from behind. Allow your arms to rest on the pillows and relax your shoulders. Avoid putting too many pillows under your arms, otherwise your shoulders may be pushed up. Your feet should rest flat on the floor.

Supported upright in bed



Use pillows to support your arms and shoulders in a relaxed position with your shoulders resting down.

Supported side lying in bed



Make sure you are fully over on your side. Rest your upper arm and leg on a pillow.

Supported forward lean in sitting



Your feet should rest flat on the floor. Relax onto the pillows as much as possible. Having your legs comfortably apart may also help.

Positions to ease breathlessness following activity

The following positions may help to ease breathlessness after you have been active. With all these positions, try to relax the hands, wrists, shoulders, upper chest, neck and jaw as much as possible.



Walking aids

Research has shown that using an aid when walking may reduce breathlessness. Some people notice they can walk further, and feel less breathless, when pushing a supermarket trolley. Pushing the trolley enables you to maintain a 'position of ease' while walking. In a similar way, using a four-wheeled walker or walking frame may enable you to feel less breathless, as well as providing a portable leaning post when you wish to stop and rest. Some four-wheeled walkers have a seat so you can sit to rest, and a storage compartment, which may be used to carry bags or oxygen equipment. A walking stick may also provide a portable leaning post.



Four-wheeled walker



Rotator frame



Walking stick

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

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