

## Leaflet 7: Physical activity and exercise

### 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.

#### The effects of reduced physical activity



Breathlessness is an unpleasant feeling, therefore it is common for people who are breathless to move around less. Unfortunately, by doing less, the muscles become weaker so daily tasks take more energy. Family and friends may begin to help more with daily chores, so there is even less need to move around. Over time, this can make the breathlessness worse, which can then lead to even lower activity levels and even weaker muscles. This is sometimes known as a cycle of deconditioning.

By gradually increasing your activity level, your body will become stronger and fitter. This may mean that you feel less breathless and are able to do more despite the breathlessness. However, sometimes it can be difficult to know where to start.

#### How to improve fitness, despite being breathless

The first step is to decide what type of physical activity or exercise you enjoy or feel would be best for you. Doing something is better than doing nothing. It is recommended that you try to do an activity that makes you moderately breathless (breathless but still able to talk). Over time, this can actually help to improve your breathlessness. You may also wish to start more gently by gradually increasing day-to-day activities such as moving around the house, walking or gardening.

You might decide that you want to start doing more specific exercises, such as standing up and sitting down from a chair, to help to strengthen your muscles. Many people find motivation and social interaction of group exercise sessions helpful. There are many options both at local gyms and through NHS services such as pulmonary rehabilitation. If you would like more information about any of these options, please speak to your healthcare professional.

0	Nothing at all	
0.5	Very, very slight	
1	Very slight	
2	Slight	
3	Moderately	
4	Somewhat severely	
5	Severely	
6		
7	Very severely	
8		
9	Very, very severely	
10	Maximal	

Modified Borg breathlessness scale

### Setting goals

When planning what activity or exercises to do, you may find it helpful to use set these as 'SMART' goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed). For example:

- *I am going to..... (walk ½ a mile/ do 30 minutes of gardening)*
- *I am going to do this... (every day/ twice a week/ every Sunday)*

### Measuring physical activity

There are many ways to measure to measure how much physical activity we do. Most smartphones have a function that measures how many steps you take, and other devices such as fitness trackers, watches, pedometers or more specialist accelerometers are able to show you how much activity you do. To start with, it is helpful to get a baseline for how much you are already doing. If you already have a device that measures your activity, you may wish to look back over the last week or two to see what your average activity level is, or you can set a start date do this.

## Walking diary

Once you know what your baseline activity level is, you can start to increase this. We recommend doing this gradually, only 10 to 20% a week, or even less if you feel you tire or fatigue easily. Below is an example of how you can record the number of steps per day or week:

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Weekly Total
<hr/>								
<b>Week 1</b>								
<b>Actual steps</b>								
<hr/>								
<b>Week 2</b>								
<b>Goal + (10%)</b>								
<hr/>								
<b>Week 3</b>								
<b>Goal = week 2 + (10%)</b>								
<hr/>								
<b>Week 4</b>								
<b>Goal = week 3 + (10%)</b>								
<hr/>								
<b>Week 5</b>								
<b>Goal = week 4 + (10%)</b>								
<hr/>								
<b>Week 6</b>								
<b>Goal = week 5 + (10%)</b>								
<hr/>								
<b>Week 7</b>								
<b>Goal = week 6 + (10%)</b>								
<hr/>								
<b>Week 8</b>								
<b>Goal = week 7 + (10%)</b>								
<hr/>								

## Resources for physical activity and exercise

- [British Lung Foundation stay active exercise videos \(opens in a new tab\)](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active/exercise-video)  
Link: <https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active/exercise-video>
- [British Heart Foundation 10-minute workout \(opens in a new tab\)](https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/activity/10-minute-workout)  
Link: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/activity/10-minute-workout>
- [NHS.uk chair based exercises \(opens in a new tab\)](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/sitting-exercises/)  
Link: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/sitting-exercises/>

- [NHS.uk balance exercises \(hold onto a work surface doing these, if you need to\) \(opens in a new tab\)](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/balance-exercises/)  
Link: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/balance-exercises/>
- [MacMillan Physical activity and cancer \(opens in a new tab\)](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/stories-and-media/booklets/physical-activity-and-cancer)  
Link: <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/stories-and-media/booklets/physical-activity-and-cancer>

## 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.

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## Document details

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## 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/](https://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/>

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