



Wrightington, Wigan and
Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Hand-held fan - Breathlessness Intervention Service

Version number: 1.0

Last modified date: 13th June 2026

CUH Patient Information

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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'. Similarly, 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?

1. Adopt a comfortable position that eases your breathlessness.
2. Hold the fan approximately 15 centimetres (six inches) away from the face.
3. 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.
4. 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. [Journal of Pain and Symptom Management](#). 2010;39(5):831-838

Further Information

For further help or advice, contact the Breathlessness Intervention Service at [this link](#) or call 01223 274404, 09:00 (9am) to 17:00 (5pm) Monday to Friday.

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