



**Wrightington, Wigan and
Leigh Teaching Hospitals**
NHS Foundation Trust

Physical activity and exercise - Breathlessness Intervention Service

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Leaflet 7: Physical Activity and Exercise

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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.

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.

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 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 to 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
Week 1	Actual steps							
Week 2	Goal + (10%)							
Week 3	Goal = week 2 + (10%)							
Week 4	Goal = week 3 + (10%)							
Week 5	Goal = week 4 + (10%)							
Week 6	Goal = week 5 + (10%)							
Week 7	Goal = week 6 + (10%)							
Week 8	Goal = week 7 + (10%)							

Resources for Physical Activity and Exercise

- [British Lung Foundation stay active exercise videos](#)
- [British Heart Foundation 10-minute workout](#)
- [NHS.uk chair based exercises](#)
- [NHS.uk balance exercises](#)
- [MacMillan Physical activity and cancer](#)

Further Information

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

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