COVID-19 Coping with breathlessness and stress
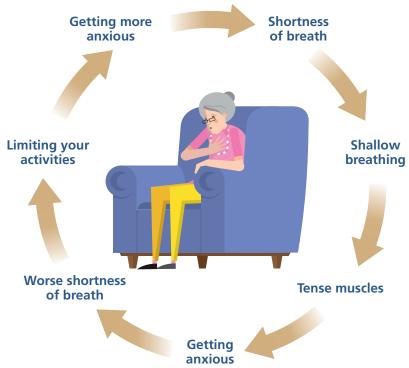
The main symptoms of COVID 19 include fever (37.8°C or above), cough or chest tightness, and breathing difficulties.

Breathlessness can be distressing. If we are feeling stressed or panic about our breathlessness a vicious cycle occurs which leads to further tension and worse breathlessness.

Getting more anxious → **Shortness of breath**

Shallow breathing

Tense muscles

Getting anxious

Worse shortness of breath

Limiting your activities

Breathing techniques

Breathing control

A technique for reducing the effort of breathing. Helpful when you are short of breath or feeling anxious.

How do I do it?

- Get into a comfortable position with your arms supported. Closing your eyes may help.
- Breathe in gently through your nose, then purse your lips as though you were going to blow out a candle or whistle.
- Breathe out with your lips in this pursed position.
- Breathe out a little longer than you breathe in but only for as long as is comfortable; do not force your lungs to empty.
- Try to use as little effort as possible and make your breaths slow, relaxed and smooth.
- With each breath out, try to let go of any tension in your body.
- Gradually try to make your breaths slower.
- Do not force your breath.

Watch this video for a demonstration: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nhHHoc8hCY**

Using a fan

The cold draught from a hand held fan can reduce the feeling of breathlessness.

How do I do it?

Do this alone as it can spread air particles. Other people should avoid the room for at least 20 minutes after you have stopped using the fan

- Hold the fan approximately 15cm from your face.
- Aim the draught of air towards your face, moving the fan slowly from side to side so that the air hits your nose, mouth and sides of your cheeks.
- A cool flannel to the face and opening windows may also help.

Positions to ease breathlessness

Some positions can ease feelings of breathlessness. They help the muscles work more effectively.

Leaning forward may improve the movement of your diaphragm. Experiment with different positions until you find out what works best for you.

Coping with anxious thoughts

Breathlessness can be frightening, and this can make us have anxious thoughts and images. Getting caught in negative thinking patterns can increase anxiety and make breathlessness worse.

It may be useful to say to yourself and write down some coping statements. For example:

- Even though I am breathless I am still breathing in oxygen.
- Stress and worry will make me even shorter of breath, relaxing will help.
- I need to practice the breathing techniques now in a good breathing position.
- This difficult time will pass.

Relaxation and mindfulness exercises may also help:
https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/publications/PIN0736_leaflet_6_relaxation_v8.pdf

- **Velindre Mindfulness and Relaxation App**
- **Head Space**
- **Mindfulness Coach**

Further advice on managing your mental health and wellbeing at this time can be found here:

https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak

https://www.psychologytools.com/articles/free-guide-to-living-with-worry-and-anxiety-amidst-global-uncertainty/