



Supporting someone
with breathlessness



Keeping active

Always get advice from a healthcare professional who knows the patient's illness before starting any exercise programme. They will be able to suggest the best type and amount of exercise for their illness.

Walking around and activity are generally good for the patient – and for you. It can help build up muscle strength and fitness. This can help to boost recovery after infections and reduce tiredness and fatigue. Being active can give more energy and also improve people's confidence and morale.

Remember that getting the patient to become more active may lead to breathlessness – this can be a good thing though as it helps build up tolerance to feeling breathless and keeps up fitness.

What you can do to help the patient

Encourage the patient to go to an exercise class designed for people with their illness. This is one of the best things you can do.

Try not to do too much for the patient. You want to help them but it's good for them to do some things for themselves.

This might mean doing things differently, or at a slower pace, perhaps stopping every so often to rest and recover. It might also mean using equipment like a walking frame.

Try and do the 'Useful strengthening techniques' further down this information sheet, together with the patient, starting with 2-3 times a week. These can be helpful when the weather is bad and it is harder to get out.

Remember, you can also support the patient to use the **Ways to ease breathlessness** on the website, while they are keeping active.



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“Not just saying ‘you must do this more’ and ‘you must do that’. ‘Come on, I’ll show you. I’ll help you and we’ll do it together’” – Karen, carer for her husband

Have you tried...?

Useful strengthening techniques

The patient can do these at home, sitting in a chair. You might want to do them together with the patient.

Try and start off by working from the level where the patient is now. Then gradually build up to do three sets of 10 for each exercise as they get easier.

Think legs, not lungs

Strengthening the patient’s legs will help their lungs - try these:

- Standing up from sitting in a chair
- Gentle marching whilst sitting in a chair
- Walking with a pedometer – try to build up the number of steps

Arm strengthening

- Arm curls using small weights (you could use small bottles of water)
- Arm punches
- Upright rows (hold small weights with palms facing downwards and elbows out to the side, raise arms up to shoulders and down again)

Please keep reading onto the next page



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Have a look at our videos

There are two videos for this support topic over on the website that you may find useful:

- **'Keeping active'** where you can learn from Sophie Howson, former community matron and district nurse, about the importance of staying active when living with breathlessness
- **'Useful strengthening techniques'** where you can learn how strengthening legs and arms will help to keep the patient active

Last reviewed: 08/05/2020