

# Take Control

The self-help guide  
to understanding  
and  
managing your own  
symptoms of

**Breathlessness and anxiety**

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# Introduction

- We hope you find the information in this booklet useful
- It is a practical step by step guide that uses self-help techniques
- It has been designed to assist you to reduce and cope with the distressing symptoms of breathlessness and anxiety.
- The techniques given to you in this book are skills that you can learn. By practising them regularly they can become automatic. You will then be able to apply them when you need to control your breathing.

**This booklet is designed to be used in conjunction with the breathlessness programme**

**If you experience any problems please make a note at the back of the booklet and discuss it with the staff at your next appointment.**





## What is breathlessness ?

Breathlessness is an unpleasant sensation associated with breathing difficulties.

It is not in itself dangerous but, can make you feel

anxious, frightened, helpless, depressed or angry.

This can have an effect on your life style and make

you feel that you may be losing control.



## **Coping with breathlessness.**

We all have our own routines and ways of carrying out various tasks.

Listed below are various suggestions which might help you to plan your day helping to control your symptoms and conserve energy.

- Look at your daily and weekly routines and decide what activity or roles that are most important to you. This will enable you to plan periods of rest and activity around what you want to achieve.
- Before you carry out an activity consider if it is necessary-should it be done, can it be given to someone else, or can it be made easier.
- Avoid unnecessary trips up and down stairs.
- Sit as much as possible when washing and dressing to conserve energy.
- Look at household activities and hobbies, e.g. can you put items that you use most frequently in easy accessible places.
- Remember to plan and pace your activities.
- Keep a note at the back of the book of the activities that you wish to plan and divide them into daily tasks and weekly tasks. Set realistic goals for yourself and what you hope to achieve.

## **Breathing Exercises**

The following breathing exercises may help you to control breathing and reduce symptoms of anxiety.

The exercises can be carried out in isolation or with the relaxation technique discussed at the back of this booklet.

- Sit or lie in a comfortable upright position. Let your body relax without tension, especially around your neck and shoulders. It may help you to have your arms supported with pillows.
- Put the palm of your hand on your upper abdomen.
- Now breathe in gently and slowly through your nose, so that you can feel your hand rise as you breath in. Don't try too hard.
- Breathe out slowly through your mouth and be aware of your abdomen falling under your hand.
- If you can, make the out breath a little longer than the in breath.
- Repeat 4-5 breaths at a time. Practise a little and often.
- Increase the flow of air around you. Open a window or use a fan. If you find this helpful carry one with you.

## Moving on with Breathing Exercises

Consider activities before you do them and think how they effect your breathing.

- Bending over restricts the movement of your diaphragm. Can you avoid this. E.g, wearing slip on shoes?
- When we do some activities we hold our breath. This can make us feel more breathless. Try to breathe through certain movements. e.g. when standing from sitting, breathe in before you move and out as you stand. You are then ready for the next breath.
- When walking or climbing stairs it can help to use the breathing exercise. Breathe in and out on each step or use a pattern that suits you. Slow down a little and you will achieve more.
- Gentle exercise promotes well being.
- Certain positions help you breath more easily, such as sitting up to sleep Your therapist will advise you as to what is appropriate for you.



## Understanding Panic

Panic attacks associated with breathlessness and anxiety are common.

Characteristics are a sudden extreme feeling of apprehension and fear, accompanied by physical symptoms such as difficulty in breathing, dizziness, tingling body sensation, palpitations, shaking, sweating and feelings of unreality. The feelings themselves are not harmful but they can be caused and maintained by a combination of worrying thoughts and over-breathing.

The next part of this booklet will explain anxiety and give you some useful tips on how to combine the breathing exercises previously explained with some anxiety management.



## What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal response experienced by all of us from time to time. It is a natural feeling and the body's reaction to a stressful or threatening situation. When we feel anxious a chain of automatic events occur preparing our bodies to react quickly and take action if necessary. This is known as the 'fight of flight' response which prepares us to run away or fight danger. Your muscles tense and prepare for action, your heart beats faster carrying extra blood to your brain and muscles, you breath faster to provide the extra oxygen needed for energy. A vicious circle develops, increasing the breathless symptom that you are already experiencing.

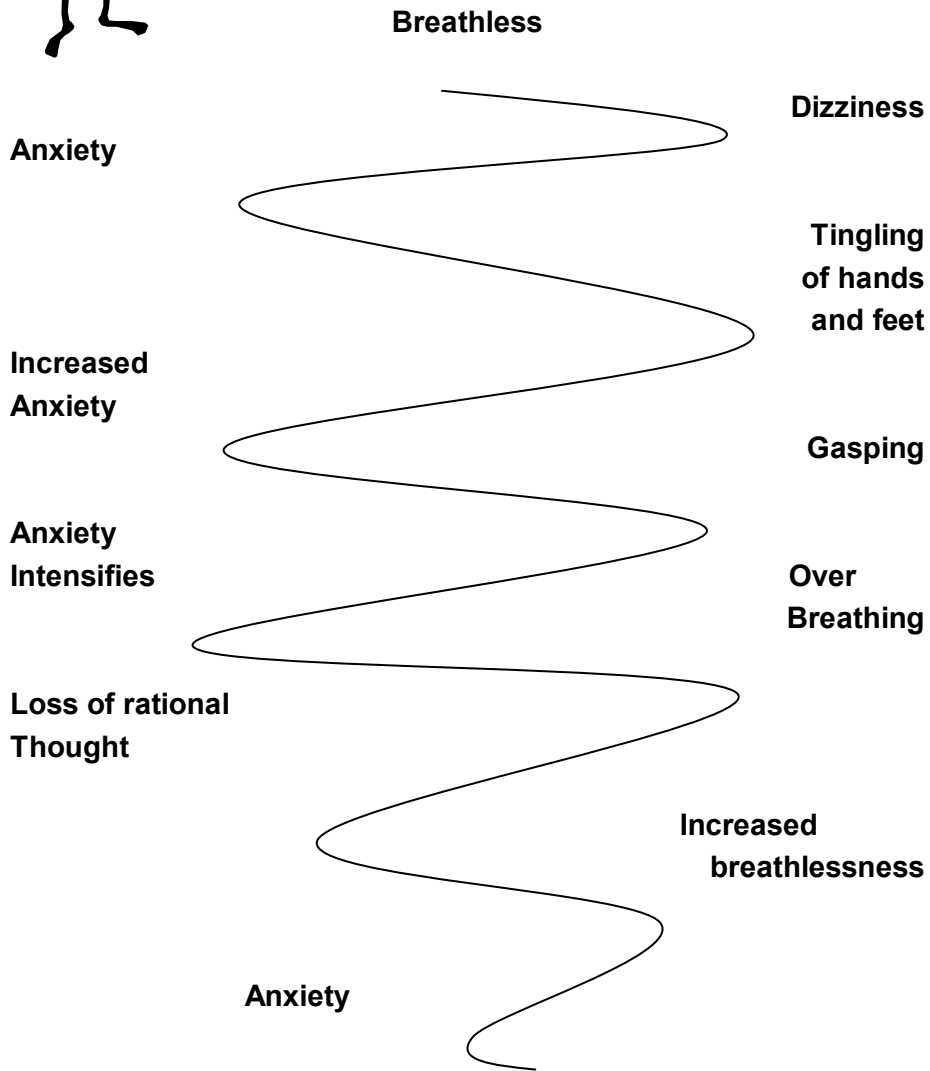
This is known as the anxiety spiral.

Your therapist will discuss with you ways that you can break the spiral.



# Anxiety Spiral

This simple diagram demonstrates what occurs when you become breathless.





## Preparing to relax.

- Find a position which is comfortable for you either lying or sitting. If you are sitting make sure your head and legs are supported. Loosen any tight clothing.
- It is not necessary to close your eyes but you may prefer to do so.
- Try to find a warm, quiet environment without distractions, but this not necessary as you can learn to acknowledge noises and 'let them go'.
- Plan for periods of relaxation in your daily and weekly routine. Remember relaxation is not to be confused with recreation. Relaxation is when your mind and body are in a state of complete calm.
- Relaxation is a skill that can be learnt to manage anxiety and also to promote well being.

## Relaxation Techniques

These can be carried out in isolation or in conjunction with breathing exercises that have been explained earlier in this booklet. ( Techniques adapted from Laura Mitchell's simple relaxation )

- Pull your shoulders down towards your feet making your neck feel longer
- Create space between your arms and body by sliding your elbows away from your sides
- Keeping arms relaxed and wrists supported separate your fingers and thumb and stretch them out
- Allow your thighs and knees to feel relaxed and roll outwards, wriggling your hips to release the tension
- Stretch your toes away from your body and relax your ankles
- Press your back into the chair and your head into the pillow or back of the chair
- Aim to develop slow rhythmical breathing by breathing in and out slowly
- As you relax your jaw feel it to become heavier. Allow your teeth to separate and your tongue fall to the bottom of your mouth
- Allow your eye lids to close
- Relax your forehead imaging the palm of your hand gently stroking it?



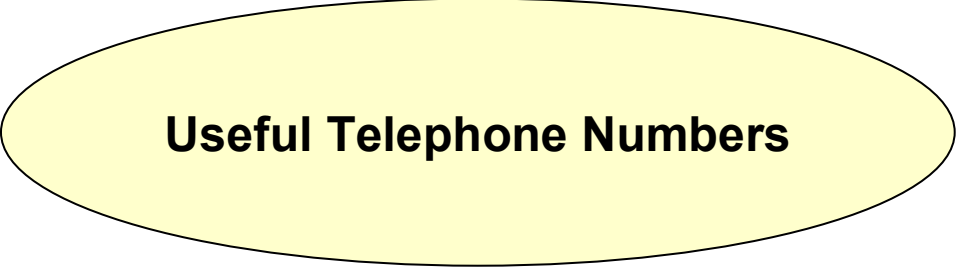
# **Your Goals**

**Daily**

A yellow oval with a black border, centered on the page. Inside the oval, the text "Your Goals" is written in a large, bold, black font, and the word "Weekly" is written below it in a smaller, bold, black font.

# **Your Goals**

**Weekly**



## **Useful Telephone Numbers**

