

Four Tips to Manage Breathlessness after non-hospitalised Covid-19 infection

Breathe through your nose



Many people, post-infection, have unknowingly acquired a habit of breathing through their mouths. The problem is that mouth breathing irritates the lining of the airways and can increase breathlessness.

One clue is that you suffer from a dry mouth during the day or at night. Breaking a mouth breathing habit requires vigilance. Try setting a quiet alarm on your phone to remind you every 30-60 minutes or ask family and friends to tell you when they see your mouth open.

Take an exclusively nose breathing walk each day. Gradually increase the time and distance ultimately aiming for 15 minutes. Ensure you are pacing yourself and taking rests as required.

Stop a dry cough

Overcoming the urge to cough is not easy and requires considerable breath control. To begin with you may need to use this exercise very frequently. As the condition of your airways improves you should find that your cough will settle over a week or two.

At the first sign of a cough, cover your mouth and swallow or drink water. Keep your hand over your mouth for at least 30 seconds resisting the urge to cough.

Remove your hand and take a few slow, smooth breaths through your nose. Repeat this exercise as needed until your cough settles before resuming normal activity.



Out of breath?

The following exercise can relieve shortness of breath but it must be used as soon as you feel the very first signs of an attack. To pre-empt symptoms use it immediately after any event that disrupts your normal breathing pattern such as laughing, sneezing or bursts of activity.

Keep calm and take control.

First change to nose breathing, both in and out, and try to relax your shoulders. Your breathing may still be very fast.

Then focus on the flow and speed of your breathing and take a couple of minutes to slowly reduce this until it is back to normal. It can help to lean forward onto a table or sit as shown, but try to keep your back fairly straight so that you are not compressing your lungs.



Add a Relaxing Pause

Your normal breathing pattern may have been disrupted by Covid-19 infection. One way to help yourself get back to normal is to practice this Relaxed Breathing exercise for 10 minutes, three times a day.

Sit with a straight back, legs uncrossed and knees shoulder width apart. Look ahead or close your eyes.

Put your hands on your upper and lower chest and settle yourself by breathing smoothly and quietly through your nose. Your upper chest should be relaxed and your lower chest expanding as you breathe in, and relaxing as you breathe out. Let go of any tension in your body. After a couple of minutes let your hands rest down on your lap.

Now, occasionally after you breathe out, pause momentarily before you breathe in again.

Enjoy this quiet time or listen to relaxing music.

Healthy Lifestyle

Your symptoms may take weeks or months to resolve so allow your body this time. Sleeping well, eating healthily and managing stress will all help with your recovery. Quitting smoking or vaping is good for lung health - visit www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking for support.

These techniques are used to help with a variety of respiratory conditions and dysfunctional breathing and have been adapted for Covid-19. If your breathlessness or other respiratory symptoms become worse please see your doctor.

