



**BTS/ACPRC Guideline**  
**Physiotherapy management of the adult, medical, spontaneously breathing patient**  
**Web Appendix 4 – Respiratory (chest) physiotherapy for people with Asthma**

www.brit-thoracic.org.uk

### **How can physiotherapy help me?**

Physiotherapy can help by teaching you ways to manage breathlessness and improve your general fitness. These techniques described may help you to cope with your breathlessness and /or anxiety but remember they are not a substitute for your prescribed medication.

### **What can I do about breathlessness?**

Breathlessness can occur if you have asthma; it can be very distressing or frightening. There are a few key things that you should know about it.

- Getting breathless on exercise or vigorous activity is normal and should be part of everybody's life.
- If your breathlessness is associated with a tight feeling in your chest and/or wheezing, then it is probably due to your asthma.
- You should take all your medication and use inhalers as prescribed.
- If your breathlessness and/or wheezing is very troublesome or persists for any length of time you should seek advice from your GP, asthma nurse or respiratory specialist or team.
- If your breathlessness and/or wheezing is very severe you should seek advice immediately or go to hospital.
- Many people with asthma find breathing exercises as taught by a physiotherapist helpful.

### **What kind of breathing exercises will help?**

Research tells us that slow, gentle and relaxed breathing is helpful for those with asthma and can reduce symptoms. Some people with asthma tend to over-breathe and learning to breathe more gently can help overcome some of the feelings of breathlessness. Practising regularly will help you learn the method so that it will be much easier to do when you begin to feel breathless. This way it may help you to cope with the feeling of breathlessness when it comes on.

### **What should I do?**

Practise relaxed gentle breathing as taught by your physiotherapist. If you can practice every day it will be much easier

to do when you begin to feel breathless. Doing this may help you to cope with the feeling of breathlessness.

Choose a comfortable position to practice in; this could be in sitting with your feet up, lying on your side or your back but propped up a little. Let your shoulders, arms and hands relax; let all the tension out of your body. It may help you to close your eyes, to listen to gentle music or a relaxation tape or CD.

Take small, slow, gentle breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. Let the air out gently and try to have a very short pause between each breath. Allow your stomach to gently rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out, with each breath.

Alternatively, the Buteyko Breathing Method is a similar way of breathing. You will need to find a Buteyko practitioner to teach you. Ask your physiotherapist.

### **What about exercise?**

Your physiotherapist will also encourage you to exercise. Regular exercise is good for your general health. Try to take regular exercise and not to be frightened of getting a little breathless when you do; it is normal to be breathless when exercising. If you have doubts about whether you are experiencing normal levels of breathlessness when exercising, ask your physiotherapist.

### **What else can I do?**

Consider the following complementary therapies. These emphasise relaxation and breathing techniques and some are combined with controlled physical exercises, a combination that many people with asthma find very helpful: -

- Yoga
- Relaxation therapy
- Pilates
- Tai Chi

continued...

## Who should I contact if I do not have a physiotherapist?

If you speak to your GP, asthma nurse or specialist doctor they should be able to refer you to a physiotherapist who specialises in breathing problems.

## Useful Contacts

Your physiotherapist is \_\_\_\_\_

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care [www.acprc.org.uk](http://www.acprc.org.uk)

British Thoracic Society  
[www.brit-thoracic.org.uk](http://www.brit-thoracic.org.uk)

British Lung Foundation  
[www.lunguk.org](http://www.lunguk.org)

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy  
[www.csp.org.uk](http://www.csp.org.uk)

Asthma UK  
[www.asthma.org.uk](http://www.asthma.org.uk)

Buteyko Breathing Association  
[www.buteykobreathing.org](http://www.buteykobreathing.org)

NHS free smoking helpline **0800 0224332**  
[www.smokefree.nhs.uk](http://www.smokefree.nhs.uk)