

## Breathlessness Intervention Service

### Leaflet 2: Hand-held fan

The information given below is designed to help you manage your stable long-term breathlessness. If your breathing is getting worse, or you are experiencing breathlessness as a new feeling, it is important to seek medical advice from your GP.

#### Will using a fan help my breathlessness?

When breathless you may instinctively go to an open door or window to 'get some fresh air'. In a similar way, a cool draught of air from a hand-held fan can reduce the feeling of breathlessness. The fan can therefore be seen as a 'portable breath of fresh air'.

The following may also help ease breathlessness:

- A cool flannel or cool water mist spray to the face
- Opening windows, for example in a car
- Desktop or floor standing fans



#### How does facial cooling ease breathlessness?

Research has shown that cooling the face with a fan is effective at reducing breathlessness. It is thought that cooling the cheeks, nose and mouth areas sends a message to the brain which reduces the feeling of breathlessness.

#### How should I use the hand-held fan?

1. Adopt a comfortable position that eases your breathlessness.
2. Hold the fan approximately 15 centimetres or 6 inches away from the face.
3. Aim the draught of air towards your face and move the fan slowly side to side so the draught covers the nose, mouth and sides of the cheeks.
4. Use it until you feel your breathing ease.

Fans with three or more rotating blades seem to be most effective as the airflow is stronger. Some people have to use the fan for just a minute, others for 10 minutes, before they feel their breathlessness ease.



The fan can be used at the same time as nasal oxygen. People using face mask oxygen have commented that cooling the cheeks, neck and upper chest with the fan helps to ease their breathing.

## When should I use the fan?

You can use the fan whenever you feel breathless. Keep the fan in your pocket when out and about so you have it to hand when needed. Keep a hand-held fan by your bedside so it is in easy reach if you wake at night.

You may find it helpful to use the fan with other breathlessness management techniques such as positioning, breathing techniques, relaxation and mindfulness. Other leaflets in this series provide further details.

## Reference

Galbraith S, Fagan P, Perkins P, Lynch, A & Booth S (2010) Does the use of a hand-held fan improve chronic dyspnea? A randomized, controlled, crossover trial. **Journal of Pain and Symptom Management** Vol 39, Issue 5, pp.831-838.

## Further information

For further help or advice contact the Breathlessness Intervention Service on 01223 274404 - 09:00 to 17:00 Monday to Friday, or see our website [www.cuh.org.uk/bis](http://www.cuh.org.uk/bis)



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## Document history

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Contact number	01223 274404
Publish/Review date	October 2019/October 2022
File name	PIN1053_leaflet_2_handheld_fan.doc
Version number/Ref	8/PIN1053/Document ID 1110