

Breathing easier

Information about managing
breathlessness and breathing difficulties



**Marie
Curie**

Care and support
through terminal illness

Living with breathlessness and breathing difficulties can be an emotional and physical challenge, but there are some things that you can do to manage this.

This leaflet includes information about:

- breathlessness
- managing breathlessness
- breathing changes towards the end of life
- how we can help
- useful organisations
- further information



You can find more information about common symptoms and how to manage them at mariecurie.org.uk/symptoms or call the Marie Curie Support Line on **0800 090 2309***.

Breathlessness

Breathlessness, or shortness of breath, is the feeling of being out of breath as your lungs work harder to draw in more oxygen. We all get out of breath when we're doing something active, but you may become breathless much more easily when you're ill. There might be a physical cause for this, like a heart problem, pain or anaemia (not enough oxygen in the blood), or a psychological cause, such as anxiety.



Please visit mariecurie.org.uk/wellbeing for more information about managing anxiety.

* Calls from landlines are free, but there may be a charge if you're calling from a mobile. Check with your mobile provider for details. Calls from any type of phone will be free from 1 July 2015.

Managing breathlessness

Tell your nurse or doctor if you feel out of breath or find it hard to breathe after light exercise, like walking. They'll try to work out what might be making you breathless and get you the right care and treatment. They may also refer you to other professionals, like physiotherapists and occupational therapists.

You can find out more about the people involved in your care at mariecurie.org.uk/peoplecare

There are several different ways to manage breathing problems.

Drug treatments

Depending on the type and cause of your breathing problems, you may be given medication. Examples include:

- inhalers
- steroids
- oxygen
- strong painkillers to calm your breathing
- drugs to make you feel more relaxed (benzodiazepines)

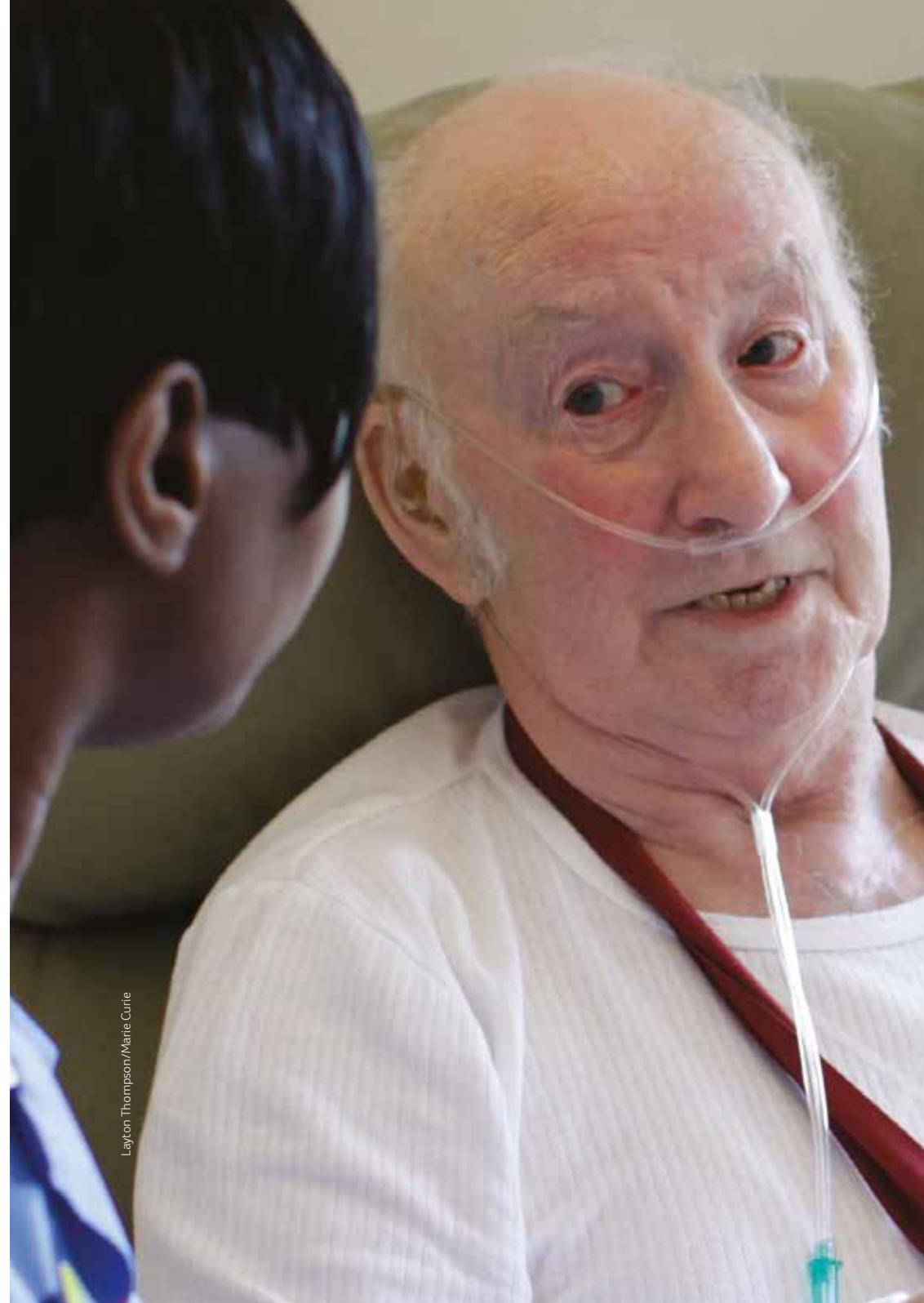
Non-drug options

You may be taught controlled breathing techniques to help with any anxiety you may be experiencing. It can also help to keep rooms well ventilated where possible, either by opening a window or using a fan.

Controlling your breathing

Breathing control involves:

- slower, controlled, normal breaths
- using the lower chest
- keeping the upper chest and shoulders relaxed



Layton Thompson/Marie Curie

The aim is to reduce effort and better manage your breathing. It can also improve the efficiency of your lungs and make exercise, like walking and climbing the stairs, a little easier.

Controlled breathing exercise

This exercise may help ease shortness of breath. You can also ask your doctor or nurse to explain how to do controlled breathing.

To prepare, place one hand on your tummy, just above the belly button. Relax your shoulders and upper chest – letting out a good sigh through your mouth can help. Rest your elbows by your side.

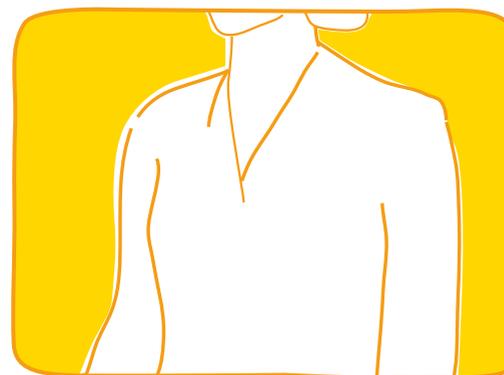
Taking your time, try the following steps:



1. Feel your tummy rise and fall under your hand.
2. Breathe in smoothly through your nose, allowing your tummy to swell.
3. Take in only the air you need.
4. Breathe out through your mouth, relax and let your tummy fall.
5. Release each breath until it comes to its natural end.



6. As you breathe out narrow your mouth slightly, if this helps.



7. Each time you breathe out, relax your upper chest a little more.

Breathing from the tummy doesn't come naturally to most people, so it helps to practise breathing control when you're relaxed. Aim to practise for at least five minutes, two or three times a day. The more you practise, the easier it will be for you to control your breathing when you feel out of breath.

Breathing changes towards the end of life

Towards the end of life, other changes often occur in a person's breathing. Breaths may become less regular, quick and shallow or deep and sighing. There may also be rapid periods of breathing with pauses in between.



We have more information about changes in breathing, including a film guide for carers, at mariecurie.org.uk/breathingchanges

How we can help

We help everyone affected by a terminal illness get the information and support they need, whether you have an illness yourself or you're a family member or friend.

Marie Curie Support Line

0800 090 2309*

Ask questions and find support. Open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. (Your call may be recorded for training and monitoring purposes.)

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Marie Curie Community

community.mariecurie.org.uk

For anyone affected by terminal illness to share experiences and support each other. Available 24 hours a day.

More information and further support

We also have an extensive range of information materials available to view online or in print. Visit mariecurie.org.uk/help where you can also find film guides, information about our services, and links to further support.

Marie Curie Nurses

Marie Curie Nurses work night and day, in people's homes across the UK, providing hands-on care and vital emotional support. If you're living with a terminal illness, they can help you stay surrounded by the people you care about most, in the place where you're most comfortable.

mariecurie.org.uk/nurses

Marie Curie Hospices

Our hospices offer the reassurance of specialist care and support, in a friendly, welcoming environment, for people living with a terminal illness and their loved ones – whether you're staying in the hospice, or just coming in for the day.

mariecurie.org.uk/hospices

Marie Curie Helper

We know the little things can make a big difference when you're living with a terminal illness. That's where our trained Helper volunteers come in. They can visit you regularly to have a chat to over a cup of tea, help you get to an appointment or just listen when you need a friendly ear.

mariecurie.org.uk/helper

Useful organisations

British Lung Foundation

03000 030 555

blf.org.uk

Runs support groups and provides information for anyone affected by a lung disease or breathing difficulties. There are links to its national services from the website homepage.

Carers UK

0808 808 7777 (England, Wales and Scotland)

028 9043 9843 (Northern Ireland)

carersuk.org

Provides expert advice, information and support to carers. There are links to its national services from the website homepage.

healthtalk.org

healthtalk.org

A website with information on a range of illnesses, with a focus on people's real-life experiences. Includes a forum where you can talk to other people in similar situations.

Macmillan Cancer Support

0808 808 00 00

macmillan.org.uk

Provides practical, medical and financial support for people affected by cancer. It produces a free relaxation CD, called *Relax and breathe*, that you may find useful.

Patient.co.uk

patient.co.uk

A free health site which contains over 4,000 health information leaflets, a wellbeing centre, a free health check, and discussion forums.

Did you find this information useful?

If you have any feedback about the information in this leaflet, please email us at review@mariecurie.org.uk or call the Marie Curie Support Line on **0800 090 2309***.

Further information

This leaflet was produced by Marie Curie's Information and Support team. It has been reviewed by health and social care professionals and people affected by terminal illness.

If you'd like the list of sources used to create this information, please email review@mariecurie.org.uk or call the Marie Curie Support Line on **0800 090 2309***

Notice

The information in this publication is provided for the benefit and personal use of people with a terminal illness, their families and carers.

This information is provided as general guidance for information purposes only. It should not be considered as medical or clinical advice, or used as a substitute for personalised or specific advice from a qualified medical practitioner. For legal, financial or other matters covered by this information, you should also consider seeking specific professional advice about your personal circumstances.

While we try to ensure that this information is accurate, we do not accept any liability arising from its use. Please refer to our website for our full terms and conditions.

Marie Curie – what we're here for

We're here for people living with any terminal illness, and their families. We offer expert care, guidance and support to help them get the most from the time they have left.

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mariecurie.org.uk/help

You can also visit **community.mariecurie.org.uk** to share experiences and find support by talking to people in a similar situation.

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