

## Breathlessness management

### Cardiac Support Services

#### Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net).

The purpose of this leaflet is to introduce a way of controlling the feelings of panic and manage your breathlessness. When you are short of breath it can make you worried. This in turn can make you more breathless. In this situation some people find that they become very anxious or even panic. Sensations of panic might include:

- Tingling sensation in your hands
- Light-headedness
- Fast or difficult breathing
- Palpitations
- Sweating
- Dry mouth
- Feeling out of control and frightened

#### Recovery breathing method

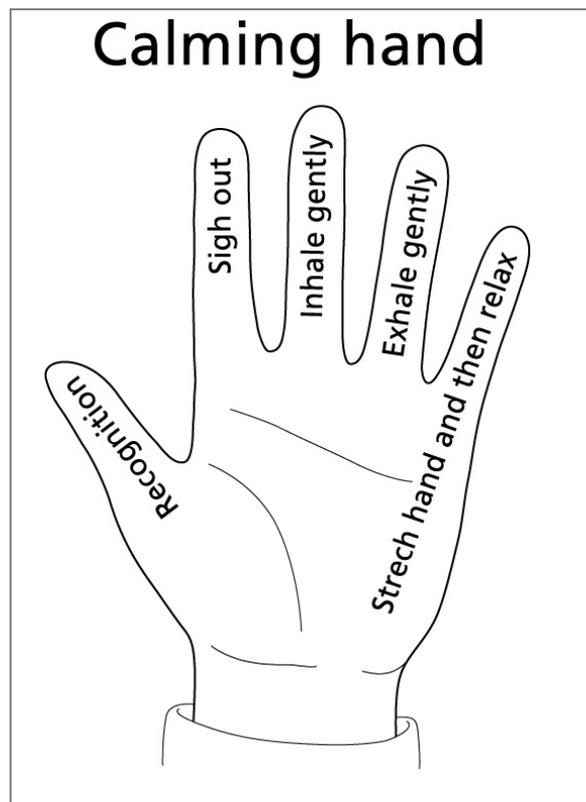
- Stop what you are doing
- Take up a breathing recovery position – see diagram on page 3
- Turn on a hand held fan and aim at your nose and mouth
- Blow out onto the fan, but don't force the air
- Don't worry about the in breath; it will take care of itself
- As you breathe out, narrow your mouth slightly, if it helps
- When you feel ready, blow out for longer
- Once your breathing has eased, straighten up

- Relax your shoulders and upper chest
- Bring your breathing back to your tummy
- Stay still for a minute after you have got your breath back before moving

## The calming hand

Is a strategy you can use to remind you how to manage when you experience panic or feel out of control.

**You could cut out and keep the calming hand diagram and put it in your purse or wallet to remind you.**



There are five steps (or fingers) to understanding the Calming Hand.

### Step 1 – Thumb

Recognition

Recognise your signs of panic EARLY and take the following steps to regain control:

### Step 2 – Index finger

Sigh out

As you do, relax your shoulders and arms.

### Step 3 – Middle finger

Breathe in slowly.

**Step 4 – 4th finger**

Breathe out slowly.

**Step 5 – Little finger**

Stretch and relax your hand.

Sometimes just hand stretching is enough to help when you are starting to panic.

**Repeat these steps until you feel calmer.**

**Recovery breathing method and positions**

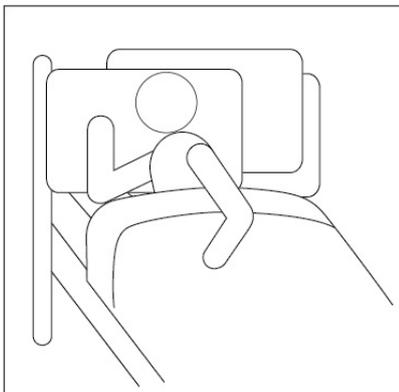
Use the breathing recovery positions and recovery breathing method together when you feel extremely breathless after activity.

These are good methods to use with a hand held fan or by an open window.

When using these positions try to keep your back straight but let your head drop so your neck is relaxed.

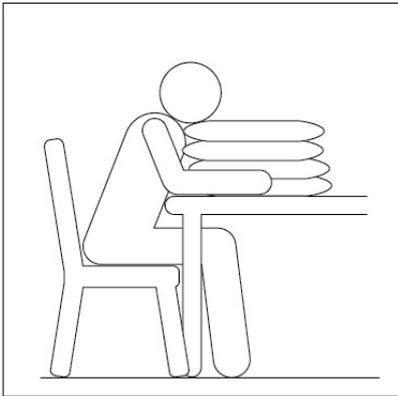
**Resting positions**

The following positions may help if you are breathless at rest or if you are feeling very tired or exhausted from breathlessness.



Make sure you are fully over on your side.

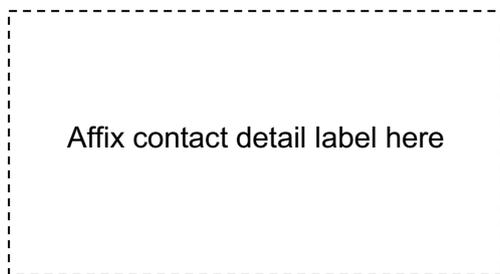
Resting your upper arm on a pillow may also help.



Relax down onto the pillows as much as possible.

Having your legs apart may also help.

## Service contact details



The service is available Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm.

## Further information

For further information, please visit our website at:

[www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk](http://www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk)

### Useful links:

#### **British Heart Foundation (BHF)**

Telephone: 0300 330 3322

Email: [heretohelp@bhf.org.uk](mailto:heretohelp@bhf.org.uk)

Website: [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)

#### **Cardiomyopathy UK**

Telephone: 0800 018 1024

Email: [contact@cardiomyopathy.org](mailto:contact@cardiomyopathy.org)

Website: [www.cardiomyopathy.org](http://www.cardiomyopathy.org)

## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern, please call 01271 314090 or email [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## **Have your say**

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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