

- Relax for a little while until your breath is back to normal.
- Take a very small breath in. Huff out to move secretions but not so hard as to make you wheeze or cough.
- Relax for a little while and take a sip of water.
- Again, take one two, or three breaths like sighs
- Relax to steady your breathing
- Take a breath in and huff

Continue the cycle. Take your time - *do not rush*. As you feel the secretions move up, allow yourself slightly deeper breaths before you huff. When the secretions are high enough you will be able to huff or cough them out.

Try not to cough too early or during the breathing exercise. If you do, take a sip of water, relax and start again.

Use whichever technique works best for you.

Try to practice these exercises at least twice a day - eg. first thing and last thing.

These techniques can be used in conjunction with a nebuliser.

Written and produced by Hospiscare community nurse specialists Kerry Macnish, Debbie Keetch, and Sue Newby, also physiotherapist and volunteer for Marie Curie Cancer Care Viv Fishwick.

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Hospiscare supports people with life-threatening illness and their relatives and carers. Its care is tailored to each individual's needs. We aim to meet their emotional, social and spiritual needs as well as their physical ones, enabling people to make the most of their lives within the limitations of their illness.

Hospiscare serves the area from Okehampton in the west through Tiverton and Exeter to Axminster and Seaton in the east.

Hospiscare Dryden Road Exeter EX2 5JJ

Tel 01392 688000

Registered charity no. 297798



Managing a productive cough

Strategies to help you control and improve your ability to cough your secretions



Information for patients, families and carers

Coughing can be a distressing symptom if it is persistent, dry or productive. Inflammation, irritation or excessive secretions cause a cough.

Productive cough

A productive cough is a wet cough in which phlegm or sputum is coughed up. The secretions that you cough up could be thin, frothy, thick and sticky and may be difficult to clear. The colour will vary from clear/white to yellow/green.

Discuss your symptoms

It is important that you discuss any cough symptoms with your doctor or nurse, even if you find this embarrassing.

Strategies that help a productive cough

Drink plenty - water preferably, as this will help thin your secretions. Juices and canned drinks are ok.

Tea, coffee and cola are less helpful as they have a diuretic effect (make you pass more urine).

Sipping a hot, steamy lemon drink.

Check that you are in a comfortable sitting position, eg. relaxed sitting, relaxed standing, forward leaning or lying on a bed with your 'good' side uppermost.

Use 'controlled breathing' combined with a 'huff' which can be easily learned. A 'huff' is when you take a gentle breath in and blow out quickly by squeezing in your tummy/waist. Keep your head up whilst doing this to open up your airway.

Breathing techniques

There are two specific techniques to help with a productive cough.

a) Active cycle of breathing

- Start by making yourself comfortable in your preferred position. Ensure that you are well supported and your shoulders are relaxed. Have a glass of water nearby.
- Take four controlled breaths (refer to Breathing Control leaflet)

- Follow with four gentle deeper breaths by expanding the lower chest and using abdominal breathing if you can.
- Four controlled breaths
- Four gentle deeper breaths by expanding the lower chest.
- Four controlled breaths
- 2 huffs
- Relax and rest for a few moments.

Repeat the cycle until you feel improvement.

b) Alternative cycle of breathing

This technique squeezes and stretches your airways so that secretions can be brought up from deep in your lungs with as little effort as possible. Sit or lie comfortably in your preferred position. Have a glass of water nearby.

- Start by blowing your nose and clearing your throat.
- Take one two or three slow breaths like sighs - breathing in through your nose if possible.