

Patient information factsheet

Calming hand: A breathing technique for breathlessness

This factsheet explains what breathlessness is and how to manage it using a breathing technique known as the 'calming hand'.

What is breathlessness?

Breathlessness is an awareness of difficult or uncomfortable breathing. This can be an unpleasant and upsetting sensation. It is important to remember that breathlessness is not harmful, and you will be able to recover your breathing.

What is the calming hand?

The calming hand is a breathing technique that you can use to help calm and control your breathing when you experience episodes of panic or breathlessness.

It is made up of five simple steps.

What are the steps?

1. Recognition and acceptance

Firstly, recognise and accept the signs that you are starting to panic. Hold your thumb firmly and remind yourself of what to do next to regain control. This will help to calm your breathing.

2. Sigh out

Sigh out, allowing your shoulders and upper chest to relax (remember to 'flop and drop'). If possible, try to breathe out for longer than you breathe in.

3. Inhale

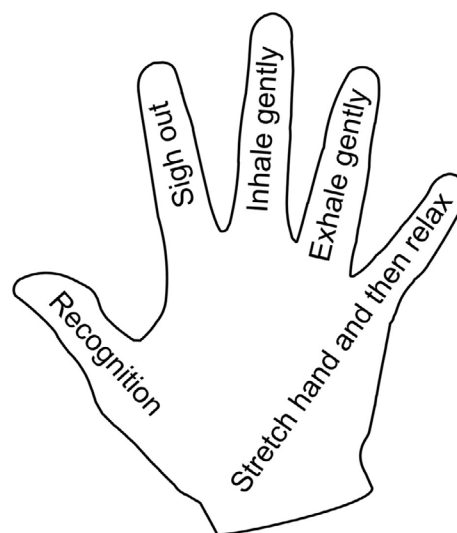
Take a slow and gentle relaxed breath in through your nose (focus on filling your lungs with air).

4. Exhale

Follow this with a slow and gentle relaxed breath out through your mouth (until your breath comes to its natural end). Relaxed breathing helps to relieve the sensation of breathlessness.

5. Stretch hand, relax and stop

Stretch and relax your hand. The simple action of stretching your hand acts as a reminder that you can and will regain control. Hand stretching is helpful when you are experiencing an episode of panic because you can do it wherever you are, without anyone around you knowing.



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After completing the five steps, you may find that you still have feelings of panic and/or breathlessness. Sometimes it can take a little while for these feelings to go away. If this is the case for you, repeat steps one to five again.

When your feelings of panic settle, try doing some 'breathing control' exercises. For more information about breathing control, please read our 'Breathing pattern disorders' factsheet which can be found at:

www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Respiratory/Breathing-pattern-disorders-patient-information.pdf

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