

Using your fan

The ILFA fan has two plastic blades that rotate quickly to produce a flow of air. You should hold the fan at least 6 inches away from your nose and mouth and direct the flow of air to the centre of your face, around the sides of your nose and above your lips.



You can use the fan for as long and as often as you want whenever you feel breathless. There are no side-effects or problems expected with using a hand-held fan if you use it correctly. Take the fan with you when you are leaving the house and keep it by your bedside so you can use it at night.

You should treat your fan with care. Here are some safety tips for using your fan.

- To start the fan, slide the two parts on each side upwards and press the button at the back.
- Do not hold the fan too close to your nose or mouth as it has fast moving parts.
- Always turn the fan off fully when it is not in use and slide the plastic blades back into position.
- The fan is not a toy; it contains a battery, plastic blades and small parts that may detach. The fans should not be given to children.
- Do not throw your fan or battery in the fire as they may explode or leak. Old batteries should be recycled free of charge in shops that sell batteries. Do not throw your used batteries in the domestic waste.
- The fan is not waterproof and it may not work properly if it is dropped in water or falls on the ground.

Pharmacological treatments

Some medications may be prescribed by your doctor to manage your breathlessness.

1) Oxygen

With IPF, it is important to use the correct amount of oxygen when you are doing activities that make you more breathless. You can increase the flow of oxygen for a short time to improve your breathlessness. Once your breathing is controlled, you can reduce your oxygen flow to normal levels. You should speak to your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist if you are more breathless than usual as you may need to have your oxygen prescription reviewed.

2) Medicine

Cough medications may be prescribed to help control your cough, although they are not always effective. Medicine containing codeine may sometimes be helpful.

Sedatives and anti-anxiety medicines can be effective at reducing anxiety associated with breathlessness.

Painkillers can sometimes help relieve breathlessness for example, morphine can help reduce the breathing rate and make breathing easier.

3) Palliative care

This focuses on relieving your symptoms, particularly breathlessness and anxiety using pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatments. It also maximises your well being and improves your quality of life as IPF progresses. Ask your doctor if your health is getting worse and you would like to know more about palliative care and planning for the future.

General advice

- Take your time and pace yourself. You should take a rest between activities and whenever you feel you are starting to get too breathless.
- Keep physically active. It is important to exercise and stay as active as you can even if you become breathless. If you do not exercise, your muscles will get weaker and your breathlessness could get worse over time. Contact ILFA to order our exercise resources - the *ILFA 2000 Steps a Day* walking pack and *Exercise DVD for Lung Fibrosis Patients*.
- Do not hold your breath when doing activities for example, climbing stairs, lifting things or bending.
- Discuss breathlessness with your family and friends so that they remain calm and know what to do to help you when you become breathless.
- If you suffer from breathlessness at night, try sleeping with 2 or 3 extra pillows or raise the head of your bed.
- Keep a diary and note activities or triggers that make your breathlessness worse.
- Drink sips of water often to avoid becoming dehydrated.
- Avoid wearing tight clothing.

Need more information?

Phone: 086 871 5264

Email: info@ilfa.ie

Website: www.ilfa.ie

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ILFAIreland

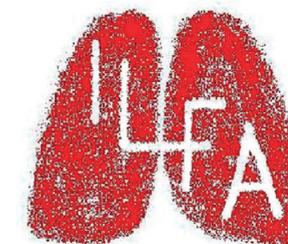
Review date 2019



Irish Lung Fibrosis Association

Registered charity number: 20053437

Company registration number: 367940



Irish Lung Fibrosis Association

Managing Breathlessness

Advice for Lung Fibrosis Patients



PO Box 10456, Blackrock, County Dublin.

Tel: 086 871 5264

Website: www.ilfa.ie Email: info@ilfa.ie

About this leaflet

This leaflet tells you about pulmonary fibrosis and how it can affect your breathing. It also gives tips and advice and describes different techniques that may help you if you become breathless.

What is pulmonary fibrosis?

Pulmonary fibrosis or lung fibrosis is the name for a group of diseases in which scar tissue (fibrosis) develops in the lungs. Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis (IPF) is the most common type of lung fibrosis. The word 'idiopathic' means that the cause of the pulmonary fibrosis is unknown.

As fibrosis develops, the soft, spongy and elastic tissue in healthy lungs is replaced by hard, thick scar tissue. This makes it harder for your lungs to expand when you breathe in. Fibrosis also prevents the normal movement of oxygen from the tiny air sacs (alveoli) in the lungs into the bloodstream, causing you to be more breathless as your blood oxygen levels fall.

What are the symptoms of IPF?

The first symptom you may notice is shortness of breath especially when you are climbing the stairs, walking, exercising or taking part in an activity. Your breathlessness can get worse as IPF progresses.

Other symptoms can include:

- a dry cough;
- low energy and fatigue causing you to feel exhausted or weak;
- stomach acid reflux (indigestion). This is common in IPF patients and can make your IPF worse if the stomach acid reaches your lungs.

Please see our leaflets *What is pulmonary fibrosis?* and *The treatment of Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis* for more information.

Breathlessness

Breathlessness, also known as **shortness of breath** or **dyspnoea** is influenced by physical and emotional factors. The exact mechanism for dyspnoea is not known but a number of complex signals reaching the brain trigger a physical response and the sensation of breathlessness.

Most lung fibrosis patients experience some level of breathlessness either at rest or while doing any type of activity. Being short of breath can be a frightening experience and can cause distress and anxiety to patients and their carers.

If you become breathless, you may experience difficult, uncomfortable or fast breathing. You may feel that you are gasping to catch your breath and sometimes your chest may feel tight and you may start to cough more. The experience of being breathless can vary with each person.

Breathlessness can be difficult to live with and can affect your quality of life by causing you to have fatigue, low mood and a feeling of loss of control. It is important to know how to manage your breathlessness to help you feel more comfortable and maintain your quality of life.

Techniques to take control of your breathing

There are a number of ways to help you take control of your breathing when you become breathless. You may need to use a combination of the techniques described here to help improve your symptoms. Speak with your doctor and physiotherapist if you have any concerns about your level of breathlessness.

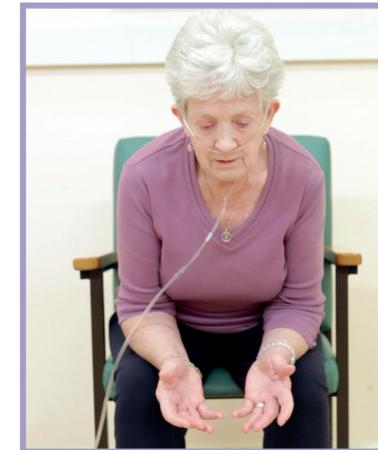
Non pharmacological (non medication) techniques

1) Positions of ease

When you become short of breath you should stop what you are doing and find a comfortable position that helps you to take control and breathe easier. Concentrate on relaxing the parts of your body that are tense, for example, unclench your jaw, relax your neck, and let your shoulders relax and drop down.

Find the position that works best for you: Some examples include:

- Sit on a chair and rest your hands on your knees with your palms turned upwards.
- Lean against a wall, a table or chair or a window sill.
- Sit upright in a chair.



Ask your physiotherapist or nurse for help to find the best relaxation positions for you.

2) The STALL breathing technique

If you become breathless, stop what you are doing. If you use oxygen, you should turn up your oxygen flow for a short time until your breathing settles. When your breathing is under control again, turn down your oxygen flow to normal and finish what you were doing.

Remember to use the **STALL** breathing technique.

S = Stop what you are doing

T = Turn up your oxygen

A = Assume a comfortable position

L = Let your imagination take you to a safe place

L = Let your breathing return to normal

Contact ILFA to order a **STALL** card for your wallet or purse. Our contact details are on the back page.

3) Use a mantra

Repeat a sentence out loud or in your head to reassure yourself, for example,

- "I have survived this before, it will go away"
- "There is nothing to be frightened of, I will be ok"
- "I am fine, I will be fine"
- "In with calm, out with fear"

4) Fan

Research has shown that using a hand-held fan or an electrical fan that blows cool air over the face can reduce the feeling of breathlessness for some patients. The movement of air can help relax the nerves in your face which makes breathing easier.

Concentrating on holding a hand-held fan also focuses the mind. This distraction can help you recover more quickly when you experience breathlessness.

ILFA can supply you with a small, light-weight, and easy to use hand-held fan. You can contact ILFA to order a free hand-held fan - our details are on the back page of this leaflet.