

# MANAGING YOUR BREATHING: ABC-123

---

## 1. BODY

Poor posture can increase shortness of breath:

- ❖ Tensing your shoulders or hunching over makes it harder to breathe because your chest cannot expand to its full capacity.

Positioning your body properly can help reduce breathlessness:

- ❖ Leaning forward slightly eases pressure on the diaphragm, allowing it to move more easily.
- ❖ Keeping your arms, shoulders and neck loose and relaxed rests other muscles that help you breathe. (Tight muscles also keep you feeling tense and anxious.)

Get into one of the following positions when you're trying to take control of your breathing\*:

### SITTING (Option A)

- ❖ Place both feet on the ground
- ❖ Lean your chest forward slightly.
- ❖ Rest your elbows on your knees.



# MANAGING YOUR BREATHING

---

## **SITTING (Option B)**

- ❖ Place both feet on the ground.
- ❖ Lean your chest forward slightly.
- ❖ Rest your arms on a table or sturdy chair.
- ❖ Rest your head on a pillow if you would like.



## **STANDING (Option A)**

- ❖ Place your feet slightly apart.
- ❖ Lean your back against a wall if one is available.
- ❖ Relax and lean your chest forward slightly.
- ❖ Rest your hands lightly on your thighs



# MANAGING YOUR BREATHING

---

## **STANDING (Option B)**

- ❖ Lean your chest forward and rest your elbows on a piece of furniture (that is secure)
- ❖ Rest your head on your forearms
- ❖ Relax your neck and shoulders



## **STANDING (Option C)**

- ❖ Place your feet slightly apart.
- ❖ Relax and lean your chest forward slightly.
- ❖ Rest your hands on a piece of furniture. Try to avoid gripping or holding the edge of the furniture as this increases tension in your upper body.



It's a good idea to practice these positions so that you know what to do with your body no matter where you are.

Adapted from *Living Well with COPD* (2006)

# MANAGING YOUR BREATHING

---

## 2. BREATH

When you find it hard to breathe, first breathe in through your **OPEN MOUTH** and out through **your mouth, pursing your lips if you can**. Do this until you are more comfortable. **THEN:**

### STEP 1

With your mouth closed breathe in a normal amount of air through your nose

### STEP 2

Purse your lips as if you are trying to cool a spoonful of hot soup

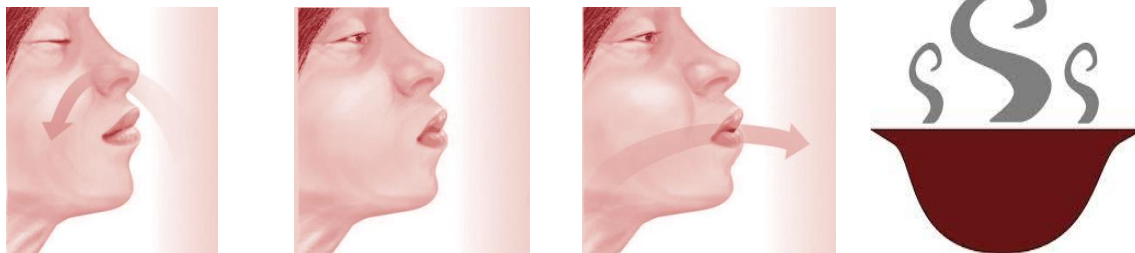
### STEP 3

Keeping your lips pursed, slowly blow the air out through your mouth. Do not strain yourself to force the air out or to empty your lungs.

**Try to breathe out twice as long as you breathe in.**

BREATHE IN: Count 1, 2

BREATHE OUT: Count 1, 2, 3, 4



It is a good idea to practice pursed lip breathing while resting and not breathless. Then you can begin to use it when feeling breathless or when completing activities that require some effort to help minimize breathlessness.

# MANAGING YOUR BREATHING

---

## 3. BRAIN

When you are struggling to breathe and your body is behaving in a “weird” way (threat response) it is understandable that all sorts of awful thoughts go through your mind. But as we have already discussed, these thoughts only act as fuel for your panic.

So, what can you do?

### ❖ Accept

Instead of **FIGHTING** the panic, **ACCEPT** the fact that you’re afraid at this moment. Don’t try to ignore it or pretend it’s not there. Don’t tell yourself to “stop thinking about it.” You are acknowledging simply that you are afraid, not that you are in DANGER.

### ❖ Stay in the Moment

**STOP “WHAT IFFING”**, stay focused on your body posture and breathing **IN THE MOMENT**. “What if “always interferes in dealing effectively with panic. Our imagination runs wild, and we think the very worst scenarios. This only increases the panic.

### ❖ Talk to Yourself

When we become very afraid, we are a child again that needs comforting. Comfort yourself with some words like:

I am becoming calm  
I can handle this because I have handled it before  
I have been breathless before and survived  
I have started to slow down my breathing  
I am calm and steady

If you are not able to talk to yourself in sentences just keep repeating the word **CALM** to yourself slowly.

**IT IS VERY IMPORTANT AFTER YOU HAVE WORKED THROUGH THE PANIC  
THAT YOU CONGRATULATE YOURSELF**