

Managing a Productive Cough

Try to practise these exercises at least twice a day.

Coughing can be uncomfortable. It may be helpful to support your chest as you cough. Do this by 'hugging yourself' or hugging a pillow.

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**Large print version
available on request.**

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What is the purpose of this leaflet?

The purpose of this leaflet is to introduce techniques that you might find helpful when trying to clear secretions.

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 or 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.

strategies that help a productive cough

- Drink plenty – water preferably, as this will help thin your secretions.
- Check that you are in a comfortable position, e.g. relaxed sitting, relaxed standing, forward leaning or lying on a bed.
- Use ‘relaxed breathing’ combined with a ‘huff’.

active cycle of breathing

This is a breathing technique which helps to loosen and clear secretions, enable you to breathe more freely and reduce the need to cough. It is much less tiring than lots of coughing.

- Start by making yourself comfortable in your preferred position. Ensure that you are well supported and your shoulders are relaxed.
- **Breathing control:** Gentle normal breathing, keeping your shoulders and tummy as relaxed as possible. Breathe quietly at a comfortable pace – you should feel your abdomen gently rise and fall. Repeat until your breathing feels comfortable.
- **Deep breathing:** This helps to loosen the secretions. Take a long, slow deep breath in and hold for a second. Follow with a relaxed breath out. Repeat about four times. If you feel light headed go back to relaxed breathing.
- **Huffing:** This helps to move secretions from the small airways to the larger ones, from where they can be removed by coughing.
- A huff is when you take a medium sized breath in and breathe out by squeezing in your tummy, as if you were trying to mist up a mirror. Keep your head up and mouth and throat open.

active cycle of breathing

Breathing control



4 Deep breaths



Breathing control



2 Huffs



1 or 2 Coughs

Only cough if you can hear secretions when you huff. If you don't produce any sputum with 1 or 2 coughs, try to stop coughing by using breathing control.

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.