
HNA Prompt Sheet: Breathlessness

Breathlessness affects people differently and can be caused by a number of factors. It can result from the cancer itself, as a consequence of treatment or worsened by anxiety experienced when feeling breathless. Evidence shows that learning how to manage breathlessness so that when it does occur it can be dealt with more effectively achieves the best results. This can include intervention from an expert healthcare professional.

Have you considered?

- Whether deconditioning or reduced function is contributing
- Whether anxiety is contributing
- Whether poor nutrition or malabsorption is contributing
- Whether secretion load, i.e. volume of phlegm or difficulty clearing phlegm, is contributing
- Whether prescribed medications are contributing
- Providing information leaflet about breathlessness which includes information about causes; pacing; use of hand held fans; and relaxed breathing techniques
- Providing information/CD on breathlessness management techniques
- Pharmacological management

Services which may be able to help

- Physiotherapy for assessment and management of breathlessness, either 1:1 or group management programmes. Physiotherapy encompasses mobility, pacing, exercise, use of hand held fans, breathing control, chest clearance, posture, positioning and sleep hygiene
- Occupational therapy for assessment and management of breathlessness, either 1:1 or group management programmes. Occupational therapy encompasses task modification with day to day activities (including aids and adaptations), posture and positioning, pacing, relaxation, sleep hygiene and anxiety management
- Dietetics for nutritional support
- Hospital or hospice symptom rehabilitation programmes
- Complementary therapies for relaxation and mood
- Psychological support services for anxiety management and mood
- Macmillan information centre
- Exercise programmes via the GP, e.g. exercise on referral
- Pharmacy

Patient information

- Macmillan Cancer Support: <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/breathlessness>
(CDs and leaflets available)
- Royal Castle Lung Cancer Foundation: <https://www.roycastle.org/how-we-help/lung-cancer-information/living-with-lung-cancer/managing-your-symptoms-and-lifestyle>
(Click on breathlessness for PDF document)

Want to know more?

- <http://www.onlinecancereducationforum.com> (Search 'breathlessness')