

Breathlessness Support Service

A distraction technique, using the five senses

This information sheet helps you manage your long-term breathlessness. If your breathing is getting worse or you are experiencing breathlessness as a new feeling, it is important to seek medical advice from your GP.

Preparation

Sit or lie in a comfortable position, in an armchair or lying on a bed. Make sure you are well supported by pillows and are neither too warm or cold. Minimise the distractions like answering the telephone; and interruptions from your family. It's a good idea to tell your family that you are having some time on your own.

Relaxing

Try and close your eyes. If this is too difficult, choose a spot in front of you on the wall or floor, and keep your eyes fixed on that point. When you are relaxed it will be easier to keep them closed. Mentally scan your body for muscles that are tense; such as your facial muscles. For example, check for frowning, or hunched shoulders. Try to gently relax these muscle groups; you might need to do this from time to time throughout the session.

Visualisation

Try to visualise a relaxing scene. It could be your favourite place, a walk that you know, a garden, or the beach. It could equally be somewhere from your imagination. Somewhere that makes you feel happy and secure, but not places that evoke bad or sad memories.

Your chosen scene

When you feel that your chosen scene is developing in your imagination use your **five senses** to make it more real to you.

- What can you see? What are the shapes and colours of the trees, leaves, grass, fences, clouds, and sky in your scene?
- Try to see the small details using your imagination.
- Slowly move on to enhance this with the senses of smell and sound.
- Ask yourself what can you hear (maybe seagulls, waves or wind) and smell in your special place.

- Imagine picking up a small object, a shell, some sand or a flower.
- In your mind feel it; what is its texture?
- Perhaps in your scene you have something to eat: a sweet, ice cream or maybe you can taste the salt air.
- Use your sense of taste to enhance your imaginary image.

From time to time, remember to note how comfortable and happy you are in this special place. Make sure you reinforce the experience as positive. When you feel relaxed, walk away from your scene in your mind, such as walking back home from the beach. Gently re-enter the real world.

When you have finished your visualisation

Remember that when you have achieved a deep relaxed state that you need to get up slowly, and allow your body to adjust. Enjoy this relaxed state, and so don't start to rush around.

Practice

The more you practice visualisation, the easier you will find it. When you start, choose a realistic time to practice, maybe 10 minutes, twice a day. Try using a cassette recorder to make your own audiotape tape of your prompts (or ask someone to make one for you). Using pre-recorded prompts can prevent your mind from 'wandering off' and help to keep you focused. It should be great fun building on this scene in your mind, and practice should enable you to tune into it just when you need to.

If you have any questions or concerns about this information, please discuss these with either your BSS Physiotherapist or Occupational therapist during one of your home visits.

Acknowledgement

This document has been reproduced and adapted from the patient information leaflets used at Addenbrooke's Hospital as part of their Breathlessness Intervention Service with the permission of Dr Sara Booth, MD, FRCP (Macmillan Consultant in Palliative Medicine, Clinical Director Palliative Care and Associate Lecturer, University of Cambridge).