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St Bartholomew's, Mile End and The Royal London Hospitals
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Our dedicated number is **18002** and then **add in the number** you are wanting to phone**.** It is available 24/7 for deaf people to access emergency services through interpreters across our hospitals.

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Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Please contact us if you need general information or advice about Trust services:
www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals

Switchboard: 020 3416 5000
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Patient information

Use of handheld fans: managing breathlessness

For patients receiving palliative care.

This leaflet provides guidance to help you manage long-term breathlessness. If your breathlessness worsens or you experience it as a new symptom, it's essential to seek medical advice from your GP or palliative care nurse.

Can a handheld fan help with breathlessness?

When you feel breathless, you might instinctively move to an open door or window to "get some fresh air." In a similar way, a cool draft of air from a handheld fan can significantly reduce the sensation of breathlessness. Think of the fan as a portable "breath of fresh air."
Research shows that cooling the face especially the cheeks, nose, and mouth sends signals to the brain that can ease the feeling of breathlessness.

Additional strategies to ease breathlessness:

- Use a cool flannel or mist spray on your face.
- Open windows to let in fresh air, such as in a car.
- Use a desktop or floor-standing fan.

How to use a handheld fan

1. **Adopt a comfortable position:** Sit or stand in a way that eases your breathlessness. Your physiotherapist or doctor can advise you on helpful positions.
2. **Position the fan:** Hold it about 15 cm (6 inches) away from your face or at a distance that feels most effective.
3. **Direct the airflow:** Aim the breeze at your face, moving the fan side to side so the draft covers your nose, mouth and cheeks.
4. **Duration:** Use the fan until you feel your breathlessness ease. This might take just one minute or up to 10 minutes, depending on your needs.

When should I use the fan?

- Whenever you feel breathless.
- While resting, walking, or pausing for a "breather."
- Keep a fan handy in your pocket or bag when out and about.
- Place a fan by your bedside for easy access at night.

The fan can also complement other breathlessness management techniques such as positioning, breathing exercises or relaxation.

Can I use the fan with oxygen therapy?

Yes, you can use the fan while receiving nasal oxygen. If you are using a face mask you may find it helpful to direct the fan toward your cheeks, neck, or upper chest to ease your breathing.

Is it safe to use a handheld fan?

Handheld fans are safe to use as often and for as long as you need. Fans with three or more rotating blades are usually the most effective.

References:

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