Breathlessness

What happens when you get short of breath:

• The airways to the lungs constrict therefore they are less efficient
• Anxiety causes more constriction
• Breathing using just the upper part of your chest is less efficient
• Fixing your chest by holding on with your shoulders and arms increases the work of breathing

Ways to help ease the feeling of breathlessness

It will be best to practice this when you are not short of breath so that it comes more naturally to you.

You may have started breathing with just the upper part of the chest so you need to relearn breathing using the lower chest and relaxing the upper part. This is more effective and uses less energy.
Breathing control

**Sitting** – back well supported
  – drop shoulders down, relax hands in lap

When you breathe in, try to feel the lower ribs and upper abdomen expand/swell.

It may be helpful to put your hand on your abdomen to feel what is happening.

Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth or nose, gently.

This will take practice to do correctly especially when you are short of breath, however it will help you gain control more quickly.
Positions

You can carry out breathing control in various positions.

High side lying

Use 4-5 pillows. Lay on your side slightly forwards to allow your abdomen to be unrestricted, you may find a pillow under your waist helpful. Bend your knees slightly with the top leg in front of the bottom one.

Sitting at a table

Put a couple of pillows on a table and rest your chest and head on them. Your abdomen should be free to allow relaxed breathing.
Sitting leaning forwards

Sit with your arms resting on your thighs, not gripping, so your hands should be relaxed.

Sitting

Rest against the back of the chair with your arms relaxed and resting on your thighs.
Standing leaning forwards
Leaning forwards with forearms resting on something like a window sill, a cupboard or a work surface.

Standing leaning back
Lean back against a wall with your feet about twelve inches from the wall. Arms should hang loosely by your sides.
Breathing control when climbing the stairs

There is often a tendency to hold your breath when climbing the stairs but this can increase the feeling of breathlessness.

You can try breathing in time with your steps for example:
Breathe in for 1 step and out for 1 step
Breathe in for 1 step and out for 2 steps

Try to find a rhythm that is best for you.

Pacing advice

Learn to pace your daily activities. Allow yourself time to recover between activities. Try to spread your tasks out over the course of the week, rather than trying to do too much on one day.
Support groups

British Lung Foundation
Helpline: 03000 030 555
Website: www.blf.org.uk

To contact your local Breathe Easy group, call the British Lung Foundation on the helpline number above.

Support and services for carers (Birmingham)
Birmingham Carers Hub
Website: www.birminghamcarershub.org.uk
Telephone: 0333 006 9711

Age UK
Website: www.ageuk.org.uk

The Trust provides free monthly health talks on a variety of medical conditions and treatments. For more information visit www.uhb.nhs.uk/health-talks.htm or call 0121 371 4957.

Physiotherapy Services

Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham
North Suite Therapy Services (Level 1)
Mindelsohn Way, Edgbaston
Birmingham, B15 2GW
Telephone: 0121 371 3466