Hyperventilation Syndrome

An information guide for patients

Delivering the best in care

UHB is a no smoking Trust

To see all of our current patient information leaflets please visit www.uhb.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets.htm
What is hyperventilation syndrome?

Hyperventilation (also called over-breathing or dysfunctional breathing), means taking too many breaths, or breathing too deeply. It is a normal reaction to a stressful situation and usually our breathing returns to normal after this has passed. Sometimes, possibly when the stress has been prolonged, your breathing will not return to normal.

When we breathe in, we breathe in oxygen. When we breathe out, we breathe out carbon dioxide, a ‘waste gas’. We need a certain level of this carbon dioxide left in the body after the breath out. When you over-breathe, too much of the carbon dioxide is breathed out. This may give you some odd sensations and may be worrying, but they are nothing to be concerned about.

How do I know if I have hyperventilation syndrome?

Your doctor or health professional may notice you are hyperventilating or over-breathing. You may also find you experience some of the symptoms from the list below:

- Tingling fingers or around your mouth
- Dizziness
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath, or feeling you cannot get enough air in
- Bloated feeling in your stomach

You may find your over-breathing is triggered by particular events, such as anxiety about a situation, bereavement, asthma attack or following surgery.
What is the treatment?

Treatment will be provided by your physiotherapist. It may take several weeks to see some improvement. The treatment will help you to improve your breathing pattern and manage your breathing better.

Will I get better?

Most people do get better. However, there is a chance that you may have another episode if something triggers it. Hopefully if the symptoms do come back in the future, you will know how to manage your breathing by yourself.

If you have any further questions, please ask your physiotherapist:

Name of physiotherapist: ........................................................................................................

Contact number: ..................................................................................................................
Breathing control

This is an important exercise to manage your breathing.

Sitting comfortably in a chair, or lying on your back on your bed (depending on the advice from your physiotherapist), put your hand on your tummy.

Focus on breathing in and out through your nose slowly.
Try and feel your tummy moving out when you breathe in.
Your shoulders should be relaxed and your upper chest should not move.
Breathe out gently and allow your stomach to relax.
Take a small pause before the next breath in.
Regular practice is required to change your breathing habits. Your practice may include exercises in both sitting and standing. You will be guided in this by your Physiotherapist.
Other ways you can help to improve your breathing

Try to breathe in and out through your nose. This helps to moisten and filter the air you breathe. You can still breathe through your mouth when you exercise.

Try to become more aware of your breathing. It is helpful if you can identify if there are certain times or situations when your breathing changes.

If you notice your breathing changing, try and use the breathing control to manage your breathing. Try and make your breathing quieter if it seems loud.

When you are speaking, try to slow down, and use the natural punctuation in a sentence (commas, full stops etc) to take a small breath.

Try to avoid or postpone sighing, yawning or taking very big breaths of air in.

Relaxation can be very effective to help you to gain control of your breathing. Try using the technique shown in this leaflet, please see overleaf. There are many tapes and exercises available from other sources, which you may want to try as well.

It is important to have a balanced diet. Try to avoid drinks that contain caffeine (tea, coffee, cola) as these can make your over-breathing worse.

Exercising can improve confidence and mood. If this is difficult, discuss it with your physiotherapist.
Ensure you are in a comfortable position and that the room is quiet

Close your eyes

If there is any noise, notice it and then release it from your mind

Imagine you are somewhere you find peaceful and safe

Breathe gently, from your tummy, if this is comfortable

Focus on your body, on your joints, feel them on the bed or chair

Feel your head, tense your face/jaw muscles, then relax them and let your head go heavy on the bed or chair

Think again about your breathing and feel yourself gently breathing in and then out

Repeat with your arms, working from your shoulder to the tips of your fingers

Repeat with your legs, working from your hips to your toes

Allow yourself to rest in this position as long as you are comfortable

Gradually notice the sounds around you again, open your eyes

Get up slowly when you are ready

Gradually notice the sounds around you again, open your eyes
Helpful contacts

• Physiotherapy for Hyperventilation
  www.physiohypervent.org

• NHS direct
  Telephone: 111

• British Lung Foundation
  Telephone: 03000 030 555
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

**Physiotherapy**

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