

Coughing

If huffing clears your sputum you should not need to cough. However if it does not clear your sputum, then you may need to. You should only cough if the sputum can be cleared easily. It is very important to avoid long bouts of coughing as these can be tiring and may make you feel more breathless.

How Often?

You should clear your chest often enough to keep it reasonably clear. When you are well you may need to do ACBT once or twice a day. When you are unwell or have more sputum, you may need to do shorter or more frequent sessions.

When?

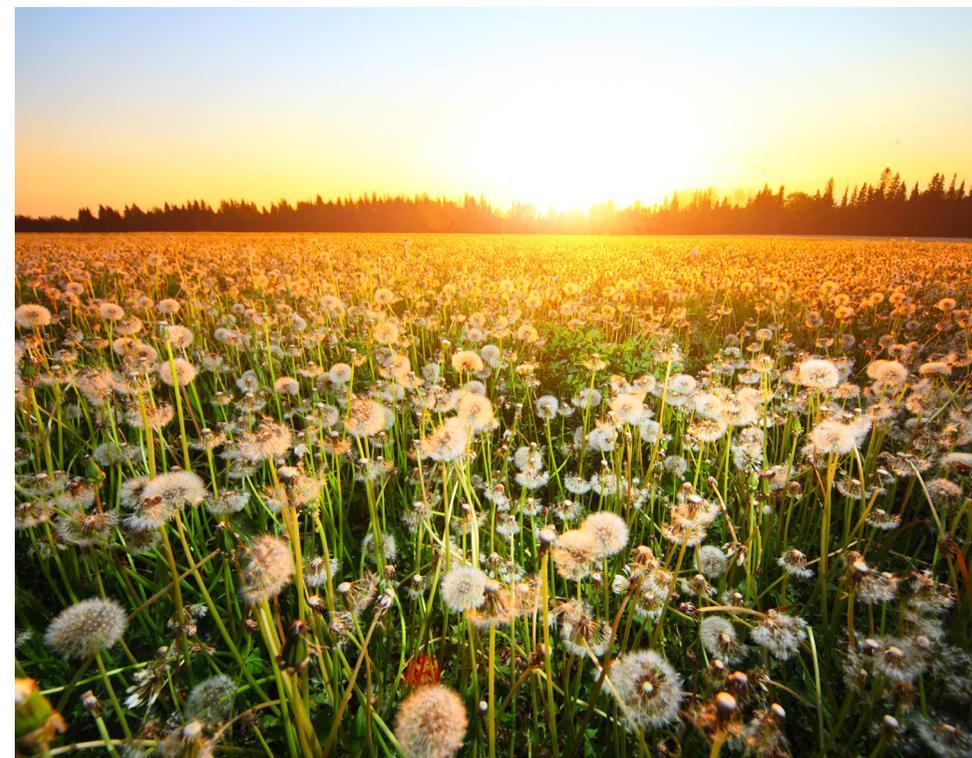
You should do your exercises when it is easiest for you to move the sputum or if you feel sputum has built up in your lungs. It is important that you fit the exercises around your life and daily routine so that you are able to do them regularly.

Which Position?

You should always make sure that you are comfortable, well supported and relaxed. It can be done in sitting or in a special drainage position as advised by your physiotherapist.

Any Questions?
If you have any questions about the information on this leaflet, please contact your physiotherapist.

Based on guidelines from Guidelines for physiotherapy management of adult, spontaneously breathing patient. British Thoracic Society



Managing your secretions

Information for patients

People with lung problems often cough and produce more phlegm (sputum) than is usual. It is important to remove sputum from your lungs to help you breathe more easily, prevent chest infections and reduce bouts of coughing.

The Active Cycle of Breathing Techniques (ACBT) is one way to clear sputum from your chest. ACBT is a set of breathing exs that loosens and moves the sputum from your airways. It may be used with assistive devices such as the flutter if this is appropriate for you.

The ACBT exercises are breathing control, deep breathing and huffing which are performed in a cycle.

Breathing Control

- Breathe in and out gently, using as little effort as possible
- Try to keep shoulders relaxed and try to make the breaths slower, letting go of any tension in your body with each breath out.

It is very important to do the breathing control exercises in between the active exercises of ACBT as it allows your airways to relax. Breathing control can also help when you are short of breath, anxious or fearful.

Deep Breathing exs

- Take a long, slow, deep breath in. Try to keep your chest and shoulders relaxed.
- Breathe out gently and relaxed, like a sigh.
- You should do 3-5 deep breaths as advised by your physiotherapist.
- Some people find it helpful to hold their breath for 2-3 secs at the end of the breath in, before breathing out.

Huffing

A huff is exhaling though an open mouth and throat instead of coughing. It helps to move the sputum up your airways so that you can clear it in a controlled way.

To “huff” you squeeze air quickly from your lungs through your open mouth and throat, as is you were trying to steam up your glasses. Use your tummy muscles to help squeeze the air out but do not force it so much to cause you tightness in your chest. Huffing should always be followed by breathing control. There are 2 types of huff which help you to move sputum from different parts of the lungs:

The small-long huff will move sputum from low down in your chest. Take a small to medium breath in with a long “squeezy” breath out.

The big-short huff will move sputum from higher up in your chest so use this huff when it feels ready to come out, but not before. Take a deep breath and then huff the air out quickly.

Start with the first type and progress to the second, using breathing control to recover between huffs.

Remember the huff needs to be through an open mouth, using your abdominal muscles.

Good Huffing should move the sputum in your chest making it “rattle”. If you are wheezing after the huff it may be that you are huffing too hard or too long. Do not huff too hard and always use the breathing control after 2 huffs.

The Active Cycle of Breathing

Your physiotherapist will show you how to put these exercises together to form a cycle.

