

Energy Conservation

People with lung problems often get short of breath or tired, or both, doing daily tasks such as getting dressed or doing jobs around the house.

Energy conservation is conserving (saving) your energy. It means finding the easiest way of doing the everyday tasks you have to do, so that you have some energy left over to do the things you would like to do. Learning to use the ideas in this leaflet will help you to do this.

It is important to remember that conserving energy is not about avoiding exercise. Energy conservation is about making everyday tasks easier and it will allow you to have some energy left for exercise. Exercise is important to increase your fitness and improve your health. Being fitter will help you manage tasks and chores more easily.

To help you control your breathing doing these everyday tasks you can also learn and use the breathing exercises in leaflet GL-02.

Remember to take rests before you get too short of breath. You can rest in one of the positions in leaflet GL-01 to help you to recover during activity.

How do I conserve energy?

The following ideas to conserve or save energy can be used for any activity or task:

- Plan ahead
- Avoid the Boom-Bust Cycle
- Pace yourself
- Use breathing exercises
- Sit during tasks and activities
- Minimise arm movements
- Avoid bending, reaching, twisting
- Use good posture
- Use good body mechanics

How do I plan ahead?

Your week: Think about all the tasks you need to do during the week ahead. Spread your tasks throughout the week, rather than doing them all in one day. Try to avoid having two very busy days together.

Your day: Spread heavy and light tasks throughout the day. This allows you to recover your energy after a heavier task. Then you will have some energy left to do other things.

Do the heavy tasks when you are at your best in the day. For example, if you have more energy in the morning, do your biggest or hardest tasks then. Avoid heavy jobs when you are tired.

Each task: Gather all the items you need for a given job; for example, ingredients, utensils, pots and pans for preparing your meal or your clothes before starting to get dressed. Then take a rest before starting the task. This allows you to recover your energy so you have some left to do the task.

What is the “Boom-Bust Cycle”?

The boom and bust cycle is peaks of over-activity (the boom) and troughs of under-activity (the bust).

For example, on a good day when you have more energy, it is tempting to do all the jobs or activities that you have put off before. If you do this, you may do more than your body is used to. As a result you can experience fatigue and tiredness and feel more short of breath. This leads to the ‘bust’ phase, where you have no energy. To recover from this ‘bust’ phase you are forced to rest, sometimes even for a few days.

After a few days rest, you feel better and start the over-activity again and so this harmful cycle goes on. But as time goes on ►

► you are able to do less and less even on the 'boom' days and the 'bust' periods last longer. This is because each period of under-activity ('bust') results in a drop in fitness.

How do I pace myself to conserve energy?

Pacing to conserve energy is the opposite of the Boom-Bust cycle. It is learning to recognise how much you can do and at what speed, so that you avoid exhaustion. You learn to pace yourself and take enough rests. By slowing down, or stopping to rest before you are exhausted, you will be able to continue or restart the activity, and you will find that you can carry on for longer. It also means you won't need to rest for as long, because you are not as tired when you do stop to rest. Hurrying may have always been part of your life but trying to use these pacing tips may help you to do more. Pacing requires practise and it can be hard changing lifetime habits.

Pacing is especially useful when you are breathless or tired, and so how often and when you use these tips will vary from person to person. Most people find that pacing is especially helpful when they are unwell, and many use it all of the time. Practising when you are well can make it easier to use when you are unwell.

Keeping to a moderate, steady pace during tasks and activity allows you to be most productive. For example, don't rush to get to the top of the stairs, pace yourself to leave some breath for when you get to the top. You should plan rest periods throughout the day, such as a short rest period every hour. This will help you to conserve your energy and keep going for more of the day. Some helpful tips are:

- Avoid fatigue
- Get enough rest
- Do not wait until you are tired before you stop and rest
- Try to have a rest or lie down for a short time in the afternoon to recover some of the

energy used during morning activities

- Avoid hurrying or rushing
- Avoid large meals
- Avoid activities for 1 hour after meals

How do I do breathing exercises?

Use the exercises in leaflet GL-02 to help you. Ask your physiotherapist to provide this for you. If you have been taught pursed lips breathing or 'blow-as-you-go' you can use these during activities. Do not hold your breath - When in doubt, breathe out!

Have adequate ventilation in your home-cooking odours, cleaning products and humidity can make breathing more difficult. Avoid aerosols and sprays; for example, try using a damp cloth to dust.

Why should I sit during tasks and activities?

Sitting uses less energy than standing. For example, try sitting in the bathroom when washing or drying yourself. Having a seat in the shower can be helpful. Sitting down for a simple task such as to prepare vegetables for a meal can also help you to save your energy.

How can I minimise arm movements?

This is especially important for tasks above shoulder level. Try to keep your elbows as low as possible and close to your body. For example, rest your arm against your chest as you clean your teeth. If you can, support your elbows on a surface when working in one place, for example, when preparing vegetables, or shaving, brushing your teeth or combing your hair. See leaflet GL-01 for positions to reduce breathlessness. Use a towelling robe instead of rubbing yourself dry with a towel. For activities or tasks above your head, try to break the activities down into smaller sections, and have a rest between each section. Breathe out when you lift your arms



► **How do I avoid bending, reaching, twisting?**

Organise your things so that they are within reach. Instead of twisting, move your feet to turn your body. If you do have to bend, reach or twist, breathe out as you do it. Use long handled equipment for reaching for example a 'helping hand' to pick things up from the floor or a long handled sponge to wash your feet.

How do I use good body mechanics?

The way that you do an activity can make it easier or harder. Good body mechanics can help you to make tasks easier. For example if you need to move something, it is easier to push or pull it rather than lift it. Pushing is usually easier than pulling. If you need to move something in the kitchen you can slide objects along a counter rather than lifting or carrying them.

If you do have to lift something, bend your knees and use your leg muscles rather than bending your back, and stand close to any objects to be moved. This will help you to use the stronger muscles in your legs to do the work and will also be better for your back.

If you have been taught 'blow-as-you-go' you can use this when you have to lift or move

objects. For more information see leaflet GL-02 – ask your physiotherapist to provide this for you.

If you would like more help or advice with energy conservation, ask to see a physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist.

Useful contacts

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care
www.acprc.org.uk

British Thoracic Society
www.brit-thoracic.org.uk

British Lung Foundation
www.lunguk.org

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
www.csp.org.uk

Asthma UK
www.asthma.org.uk

