

## SPUTUM CLEARANCE

Mucus is produced in the lungs to help filter the air that we breathe in. In some situations, more mucus (or sputum) is produced than needed. This can be due to inflammation within the airways or infection in the lungs.

Excess sputum can feel uncomfortable, worsen breathlessness, and cause wheezing (a noise when breathing).

If the sputum is not cleared regularly from the lungs, it can cause further irritation and increase the risk of chest infection.

At times, sputum can be discoloured and/or thick and sticky. This can make it more difficult to clear.

A simple measure to help with sputum clearance is to drink plenty of fluids throughout the day, in particular water and juice. This helps keep the sputum loose.

If your sputum becomes discoloured and/or thicker and/or increases in amount and you feel unwell, visit or contact your GP.

### Cough

Coughing is a simple way of clearing sputum as long as it does not cause increased breathlessness, wheezing, or pain.

### Huff

If coughing does cause any of these symptoms, it may be more comfortable and effective to 'huff':

- get into a comfortable position
- take a breath in
- with your mouth open in an 'O' shape and your cheeks tight do a short, forced breath out. Imagine you are steaming up your glasses or a mirror
- you can often hear the sound of sputum as you do this and you may need to take different size breaths to help move the sputum upwards
- if the huff is too short it may be ineffective, if it is too long it may cause coughing. It just takes a bit of practice.

Only do about one to two huffs at a time to avoid tiring or going dizzy.

In between huffs, you can drink to help keep the secretions loose and practice breathing control to avoid becoming more breathless.

Continue the huffs until you feel you have cleared the sputum.

### **Comfortable position**

Certain positions can make clearing sputum easier.

Sitting in a comfortable, upright position makes coughing and huffing easier.

Sometimes people find it easier to clear their sputum by standing up, walking or doing some gentle exercise. This can allow more air into the lungs to help move the sputum. Alternatively, some people can clear more sputum when they lay down on their side, back, or front. Others, however, may become more breathless when doing this.

Your physiotherapist will advise you which positions to use to help clear your sputum. Find the position that best suits you.

The information in this leaflet is intended to remind you what you were advised by your physiotherapist. Please ask your physiotherapist if you have any further questions.

### **Contact details:**

#### **Acute Services Physiotherapy**

Doncaster Royal Infirmary **01302 366666 ext 3810**

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This information may be available in other languages and formats, on request. Please contact the Patient Advice & Liaison Service on (01302) 553140.