

■ Catching it early

If it has happened to you before, you may be able to identify the 'warning signs', for example, a stifling feeling as if the window should be open, tightness in the chest, or noticing your breathing is fast. These should be your cue to:

- ❶ Stop whatever you are doing and try to find a quiet place to sit down.
- ❷ Close your eyes and focus on the word 'calm' in your mind.
- ❸ Try to release some of the tension in the upper body. Sitting in a tense hunched-up position increases the possibility of hyperventilation. Dropping shoulders in a sideways widening direction makes hyperventilation more difficult since the chest and diaphragm muscles are stretched outwards.
- ❹ Breathe slowly from the stomach, *not* the chest. Breathe in to a count of four slowly and out to a count of four slowly. Or visualise your breathing in as going up one side of a hill, experiencing a plateau at the top, and then breathing out as though coming down the other side. Slow your breathing rate to 10 to 12 breaths per minute.
- ❺ It may also help to place your hands with your fingertips together on your stomach; make sure that each time you breathe in, your fingertips come apart.
- ❻ Concentrate on breathing out. Try to breathe through your nose.

■ The re-breathing technique

If your symptoms don't go away after a few minutes it is probable that you haven't caught it quickly enough, and you will need to use the re-breathing technique. This involves breathing in the air you have just breathed out. This air is richer in carbon dioxide and will thus quickly replenish the carbon dioxide you have been exhaling.

- ◆ Make a mask of your hands and put them over your nose and mouth and keep them there.



- ◆ Breathe in through your nose (if possible).
- ◆ Breathe out hard through your mouth.
- ◆ Breathe your own exhaled air.
- ◆ This should be done slowly and without holding your breath. Repeat four or five times (no more).
- ◆ All the time try to stay calm and relaxed.

It is even better to use a paper bag (*not* polythene) over your nose and mouth instead of your hands, if circumstances allow. Adjust your posture so that your elbows are on a level with or above your shoulders. (This makes it difficult to overbreathe.)

■ Recognise hyperventilation

Try to occasionally monitor your breathing rate. Do you breath too deeply or shallowly? Do you sigh and yawn more than others? Triggers for hyperventilation that should be avoided include low blood sugar, tobacco, tea, coffee and other stimulants which accelerate the fight or flight response. Do you breathe in but do not breathe out?