

## ■ What to do if you are with someone who is hyperventilating

- ❶ Don't allow yourself to panic. Keep calm, because fear can be infectious.
- ❷ Familiarise yourself with each of the procedures for controlling hyperventilation. Encourage the person to use the procedures. They may need reminding of what to do, so it may help to talk them through it.
- ❸ Don't shout or raise your voice. It should be firm but quiet. Speak slowly.
- ❹ Comfort them physically: a hand gently cupping the back of their neck, or your arm loosely placed around their upper back may be very soothing.
- ❺ They may become very emotional. Don't get into an argument by disagreeing with what they may be saying. Repeat calming and encouraging statements, such as, 'Just rebreathe your own air . . . you're going to be all right . . . that's it, just drop your shoulders . . . relax'.
- ❻ Afterwards, treat as if for shock, with rest.

## ■ Voluntary hyperventilation

If you find it difficult to believe that the terrifying symptoms experienced during a panic attack can be caused by hyperventilating, try the following experiments.

**Exercise 1.** Deliberately breathe quickly and deeply through your mouth and nose for 30 seconds and list the symptoms that you experience. It is reassuring to have a paper bag handy for the rebreathing exercise if symptoms are particularly unpleasant. This exercise is useful to show how you can both start and stop, and so control these unpleasant symptoms. This experiment is not dangerous but it is probably more helpful to do it with somebody else.

**Exercise 2.** Breathe through a straw for one minute. Don't allow any air through your nose; hold your nostrils together.

Rate how unpleasant the sensations are from these exercises and rate how fearful you are. Practice the procedures because the more you consciously provoke the symptoms and then turn them off, the more control you will feel. Try to experience the intensity of the sensation. Fear reduction is accompanied by confronting the things that frighten you.