

Airway Clearance Techniques: Huff and Cough

What are Airway Clearance Techniques?

Airway Clearance Techniques (ACTs) are an essential part of management for people with cystic fibrosis (CF). Performing regular airway clearance helps loosen the thick sticky mucus from the airways so it can be cleared more easily. Huffing should be taught by your CF specialist physiotherapist and be part of all airway clearance routines.

What is a Huff?

Huffing changes the airflow in the airways to help move mucus towards the mouth so it can be cleared more easily with a cough. A huff is an active breath out with an open throat, like a sigh, as if trying to fog up a mirror. Huffs can be taught from a young age using cardboard huff tubes and tissue butterflies or a mirror.

Huff Technique

Different types of huffs move mucus from different sized airways. Longer, more gentle huffs help to move secretions from lower, smaller airways. To do this type of huff, take a small to medium breath in and huff the air out using your tummy muscles, being careful to avoid a wheeze or cough.

Listen for the crackling noise your mucus makes – if it is early in the breath out,



the mucus is higher up in your airways, closer to the mouth. If the crackles are later in the huff you may need to keep huffing at that volume until it moves.

Once you can hear that the mucus is higher, in the larger upper airways, you can use a short, fast huff to shift the mucus. Take a deeper breath in and huff the air out more quickly to clear the mucus or use a cough.

Try not to cough until you can clear the mucus with one or two coughs. Always do quiet breathing after huffing to help relax the airways.

Things to Remember

- When learning to huff, use a cardboard tube to help keep your mouth and throat open.

- Use your tummy muscles to squeeze air out without causing a wheeze or cough.
- Use different sized huffs to shift mucus from different airways.
- Always use relaxed breathing after huffing and coughing.

Useful Resources

- [Huffing and Coughing \(CF Foundation\)](#)
- [CFWA Airway Clearance Factsheets](#)

Cystic Fibrosis WA
The Niche
11 Aberdare Road
Nedlands WA 6009

T: +61 8 6457 7333
F: +61 6457 7344
E: admin@cfwa.org.au

Disclaimer: This publication is for general education and information purposes. Contact a qualified healthcare professional for any medical advice needed.
© Cystic Fibrosis Western Australia