Laughter the best medicine comes in liquid form

Doc’s Spoonful of Medicine

#11. Everyone knows Fletton is a good BREATHING ground.

It never ceases to amaze me how many smokers, especially asthmatic ones, ring up to say “I can’t breathe. I can’t even smoke a fag, Doc!” Now I know that no smoker likes lectures about quitting, so this will not be one. A smoker who does not know the risks by now, lives in Cloud Cuckoo Close, Fletton, you know the one with those unaffordable houses! Merely to say that there are little hairs in the tubes of your lungs called “cilia” that beat particles and mucus out of your lungs, which each cigarette paralyses for about 4 hours. If you allow 8 hours for sleep, that means you can probably only get away with 1 to 4 fags in a day without the lungs filling up with dust, ash, tar, and carcinogens. The mucus that wraps these up is the phlegm that smokers cough up in the mornings before that first fag paralyses the cleaners again, after overnight recovery. So, if you must!

Asthma is a genetically inherited tendency to narrow the airways, and this is why asthmatics wheeze, cough and feel short of breath. Allergic asthma tends to start in early childhood and the faeces of the house dust mite is the commonest trigger. Guess where this is most prevalent... in those cuddly toys that surround the unsuspecting baby or toddler in the cot or bed. In our house we put the teddies to bed in our “toy room” till the morning and slept with the windows vented or locked ajar for maximal oxygen ventilation. Most asthma attacks occur at night in closed spaces when oxygen levels are low and dust count is high. Other asthma triggers are pollen (seasonal shortness of breath), animals and dairy foods. For elderly people shortness of breath especially at night is a feature of heart failure from age or previous heart damage, such as heart attacks.

The perception of shortness of breath is in the brain respiratory centre, but involves special cells in the lungs, the chest wall muscles, and the arteries of the neck. A mismatch between the need for more oxygen and the ability to breathe well enough to deliver this oxygen, is what causes that discomfort, chest tightness, panting and anxiety. The most important breathing muscle is the diaphragm which pulls the lungs down and open and the rib cage which rises and expands to open the lungs, but the flaring of the nose and opening of the mouth all contribute. Learning to breathe is so important, especially in sport (UP THE POSH!), and for anyone having an anxiety attack.

Please remember two things. First breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. It comes with practice, so persevere. The nose warms or cools the air, and special IgA antibodies in nasal mucus kill bacteria and viruses, including CoVid -19. This may be one of the reasons why babies, who are obligate nose breathers, may be so unaccountably immune to CoVid-19. Narrow long noses prevail in cold air climates, and wide flat noses prevail in hot air climates. No coincidence.

Secondly breathe slowly to get the maximum “bellows action”. Slow wide opening and closing of bellows fans a fire better than shallow fast fanning. For you kids, “Bellows” is not a rap artist who shouts. It was a handy device for old open fires. So, breathe in through the nose counting slowly to four then out through the mouth counting slowly to four, and (Uncle) Bob is your Mum’s brother! No more feeling of imminent death from breathlessness. It takes time, but it comes with practice. For those with persistent “blocked nose”, I advise taking to your friendly doctor about it. There may be help available. Yo!! Teenager, panting with your panic attack, first breathe properly, slowly, fully in and out. Then let’s find out what other help we can offer, Capice?! Flettonians always have been a breath of fresh air in their friendliness and humanity since I first moved here. Aannd…,breathe!